HOUSE OF COMMONS OFFICIAL REPORT

Sixth Series – Volume 204

Session 1991-92

ISBN 0 10 681204 1

CORRECTION

26 February 1992. *Written Answers*. Column 500, in last line of column, "12 per cent." should read "21 per cent."

May 1993

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 204

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1991-92

COMPRISING PERIOD
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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

FORTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 204**

SEVENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1991-92

House of Commons

Monday 17 February 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Water Pollution

1. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many water pollution incidents were the subject of prosecutions in each of the last three years; and what was the total amount levied in fines in each year.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): With permission, Mr. Speaker. I shall circulate the full information in the *Official Report*. The number of successful prosecutions in the National Rivers Authority's Welsh region was 65 in the year to 31 August 1990, 85 in the year to 31 August 1991 and 20 in the three months from 31 August 1991 to 30 November 1991.

Mr. Griffiths: Is the Minister aware of what the National Rivers Authority calls the mysteriously high levels of copper, zinc and lead pollution in the lower Ogmore estuary in my constituency? In two successive years, the Government imposed budget cuts on the NRA yet Welsh Water was fined only just over £18,000 for 17 pollution incidents, although it is making profits that average £120 million a year. Does not the Minister believe that it is about time that the Government took stiff action, so that the potential to fight pollution is not wasted as it is at the moment, due to the Government's lackadaisical attitude?

Mr. Bennett: Apart from the fact that the hon. Gentleman's figures are wrong, the NRA's budget is £431 million. The NRA was established by the Government to tackle water pollution—something that the last Labour Government did not do. We have increased the amount of money being spent on purifying water and the results are clear. Welsh water is cleaner than English water and is some of the best in Europe. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is for ever denigrating the water of Wales.

Sir Anthony Meyer: As I had severe doubts about the privatisation of water, can my hon. Friend tell me whether investment in water in Wales has increased or decreased since privatisation?

Mr. Bennett: My hon. Friend will know from the figures that, under the last Labour Government, investment in the water industry was severely cut by the Treasury. Since the industry was privatised under the Government, Welsh Water alone is investing £500,000 a day, or £1·8 billion over the next 10 years, to improve our water.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Minister acknowledge the enormous increase in water charges in Wales since privatisation? Given that the increase is hitting hard the water rate payers in Wales, should not all the money that is raised by Welsh Water be used to increase water standards, instead of being spread around as profits among private individuals, who are benefiting from a monopoly?

Mr. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman asked me that question before, and he still does not appear to understand the answer. All the money, and more, raised from charges to Welsh water consumers is used for investment. For every £100 raised by charges, £108 is spent on investment. The shareholders of Welsh Water—a separate company—get dividends from the investments that Welsh Water makes in other interests. Nothing is done with Welsh

Water charge payers' money other than to invest it in water. The hon. Gentleman ought to understand that point.

Following is the information:

	Prosecutions	*Fines* £	*Costs* £
1 September 1989 to 31 August 1990	65	58,255	40,926·81
1 September 1990 to 31 August 1991	85	306,400	77,582·23
1 September 1991 to 30 November 1991	20	11,300	6,007·23

A small number of prosecutions have been unsuccessful. Costs for the period 1 September 1991 to 30 November 1991 may be subject to amendment.

Further information is contained in the NRA's report "Water Pollution Incidents in England and Wales 1990", which was published last month.

NHS Trusts

2. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the consideration he gives expressions of public opinion in assessing whether an application for NHS hospital trust status should be approved.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): I take full account of all relevant representations.

Mr. Williams: Does the Minister accept that every opinion poll on the subject shows that the overwhelming majority of the public oppose NHS trusts and see them as a stepping stone to privatisation? If the Government—who privatised the gas, electricity and water industries—are returned at the next general election, they will privatise the NHS. Why do not the Government abandon that creeping privatisation and listen to the public, who want the NHS to be modernised, not privatised?

Mr. Hunt: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is, for instance, referring to the Wales Trades Union Congress opinion poll, but I shall quote from one of the instructions to those who conducted it:

"Street ballots are to be held as a means of offering the public the opportunity to show their opposition to opting out."

I hardly think that that was a fair poll.

In 1979, Labour said that the Conservative Government would privatise the health service. Nothing has been further from the truth, and the position is still the same. We have no plans to privatise the health service. The latest opinion poll on the health service in Wales showed that nine out of 10 of the people who received hospital treatment in the past two years were very or fairly satisfied with it. Approval of the Government's conduct of the health service is at record levels.

Mr. Grist: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the success that national health service trusts in England are enjoying should reassure anybody in Wales about any application that might come before him?

Mr. Hunt: I agree with my hon. Friend. Approval has been widespread and distinct improvements have been made. I remind the House of the figures and statistics. When we took office in 1979, an average of £170 per man, woman and child was spent on the health service in Wales. My recent announcement took the figure to £651. There is no question of underfunding—rather, there has been a generous allocation of resources.

Mr. Livsey: Parents are allowed a vote when schools opt for grant-maintained status, yet no such vote is allowed when an NHS hospital applies to become a trust. Does not the right hon. Gentleman think that that is very unfair?

Mr. Hunt: The two examples are not comparable. There is no question of any national health service trust leaving the NHS. Parents have a vote on the governorship of schools, but health service trusts must show the Secretary of State for Wales that the quality of service will improve and that they will remain within the national health service.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I put it to my right hon. Friend that trust status is the finest form of devolution within the national health service, taking decision making down to the most local level. By increasing NHS spending by approximately 60 per cent. in real terms, the Government are showing the finest and best commitment to the NHS in Wales.

Mr. Hunt: I agree with my hon. Friend. National health service trusts mean local management of locally based health services to meet local need. The previous Labour Government took all their time in office to reach a 9 per cent. increase in real terms. Under this Government, NHS resources have increased in real terms by more than 60 per cent.

Mr. Barry Jones: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that opt-out hospitals and the Tory commercialised internal market in patients are yet further examples of the Conservatives imposing policies from Whitehall that ignore the special needs and culture of Wales and have no support among our people? There is no support in Wales for those proposals, but there is anger that the Secretary of State will tamper with the national health service in the way that he proposes. When the election is held, his party will pay a heavy price.

Mr. Hunt: We have had expressions of interest from parts of the national health service that would mean that trusts would be responsible for more than 65 per cent. of all acute services in Wales. The hon. Gentleman was a Welsh Office Minister in the previous Labour Government, when resources for the national health service increased by 9 per cent. Under this Government, resources have increased by more than 60 per cent. in real terms.

Glyntaff Farm Estate

3. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met representatives of Taff Ely borough council to discuss the future of the Glyntaff Farm estate.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Neither I nor my right hon. Friend has done so, but our officials are regularly in touch with the local authority.

Dr. Howells: By any index, the Glyntaff Farm estate is one of the most deprived and run down in Wales, and there are many like it in the Principality. Its young population, including many young children, live in houses which are falling apart and which it is estimated will cost £22 million to repair. When will the Minister do something about the administrative constipation that prevents the Welsh Office from acting, and ensure that my constituents have a better life than they have had until now?

Mr. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman will know, because he has been in correspondence with my right hon. Friend, that we are anxious to facilitate the transfer of properties to the new tenants housing association as soon as possible, but, clearly, there are matters of finance which have to be sorted out. I can assure him that I share his concerns. I want to see it happen and we shall continue to maintain close contact with the local authority to ensure that it does.

Mr. Murphy: With many estates in Wales such as Glyntaff in need of serious attention, with nearly 80,000 people on council house waiting lists in Wales, with mortgage repossessions at a record high and with nearly 20,000 homeless people in the Principality, does the Minister still insist that there is no Welsh housing crisis?

Mr. Bennett: It is interesting to consider the reality of the situation, as opposed to what the hon. Gentleman says. Under Housing for Wales, we are this year giving £170 million towards the construction of new houses. The hon. Gentleman talks about waiting lists, but he should consider an article in the *Daily Post* on 7 February this year which states that Anglesey—Ynys Môn borough council—said that it has been able to slash the waiting list from 1,522 people to only 147 by considering what people want, the number of people on the list and whether they have a valid demand. That is the reality.

I am pleased to be able to announce today that I am making available a further £1 million to five local authorities to help them to tackle homelessness pressures in their areas. A lot has been done by this Government —we do not merely sit and talk as the Opposition do. Action is what counts and that is what we are providing for Wales.

Primary Education

4. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent per pupil in primary schools in Wales in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what was the comparable figure for 1978-79 at constant prices.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir Wyn Roberts): In 1989-90 current expenditure per pupil in primary schools in Wales was £1,292. The equivalent constant price figure for 1978-79 was £974.

Mr. Knox: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that current and capital expenditure on education in Wales have risen in real terms since 1979?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have just given my hon. Friend the figures for primary schools. He will, I am sure, be interested to know the figures for secondary school pupils which show an even more remarkable increase of about 46·4 per cent., from £1,346 per head in 1978-79 to £1,971 in 1989-90.

Mr. Ron Davies: Does the Minister accept that it is fundamentally dishonest to represent those figures as an increase in real terms when they reflect only the fact that there has been a falling roll? Will he now turn his attention to the state of primary schools in Wales? Does not he recognise that primary schools throughout the Principality are suffering from a decaying fabric, from a lack of support from local education authorities as a result of the Government's cuts in real terms and as a result of the demoralisation of the teaching profession? Will the right hon. Gentleman recognise the crisis that is building in primary schools and, in the last couple of weeks of this Government, start to do something about that?

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman is wrong on all counts, which is a record even for him. On overall current expenditure on education, there has been a 24 per cent. increase in a period when pupil numbers have indeed fallen, by nearly 15 per cent. On capital expenditure, during the past three years about 6 per cent. less has been spent than we allocated to local education authorities for capital spending, so the blame for crumbling schools must be placed at their door. It is they that have failed to spend the allocations that we have given to them. With regard to teachers' morale, I know that teachers are extremely pleased with the 7·8 per cent. increase which the review body awarded them with the Government's agreement.

Rail Services

5. **Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has had about the standard of rail services in north Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Twenty representations have been received since the introduction of the latest timetable in September. Most of those concerned the level of inter-city services between Holyhead and London.

Dr. Marek: The Minister may agree with me that, at the next general election, it is technically possible for the representatives of the non-Tory-voting people of Wales to be swamped in the House by a south-east-dominated Tory Government who are hell bent on privatising British Rail. As the Minister's constituency is on the main line to Holyhead, I ask him to give a pledge to the House that in such an eventuality there will continue to be a proper, direct inter-city service between Euston and Holyhead.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman bases what he says on some bogus statements about the privatisation of British Rail, which we would heartily welcome, and the inter-city services. For the first time, we have the high-speed 125 trains running between London and Holyhead. They accomplish that journey in the fastest ever time—four hours, which is 30 minutes less than it previously took.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: The Minister has not answered the question. Will he tell the House specifically that there will be a guarantee that, whoever wins the next election, inter-city services will run between Holyhead and Euston —yes or no?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I welcome privatisation of British Rail. I have heard many complaints from the Opposition about the services of British Rail. I am sure that there will be a considerable improvement under a privatisation regime, including an improvement of the services between London and Holyhead.

Inward Investment

6. **Mr. Gwilym Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the value of inward investment in *(a)* 1979 to 1983, *(b)* 1983 to 1987 and *(c)* since 1987; and what estimate he has made of future inward investment trends.

Mr. David Hunt: Between 1979 and 1983, 102 projects were recorded. Between 1984 and 1987, 202 were recorded and, since 1987, 271 have been recorded. The recorded value of inward investment in Wales since 1984 is £4 billion and the number of new and safeguarded jobs now exceeds 100,000. We intend to build on those excellent results in future years.

Mr. Jones: I welcome the successful figures which my right hon. Friend announced. Does he agree that all that would be put at risk if we were to return to the bad old days of excessive strikes and secondary picketing, not to mention the TUC's campaign of hostility towards inward investment in which it has described those companies as alien culture—a comment still not denounced by the Opposition, who have given a nod and wink of tacit approval?

Mr. Hunt: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. The favourable tax regime for companies and individuals is a great attraction, as are the work force and the industrial relations harmony which exists in Wales. When the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) was a Minister in the second half of the 1970s, the number of working days lost per thousand employees was 1,183 a year. Between 1986 and 1990, the figure fell to 174. I now announce that we have the best figures for the past 100 years since records began. In Wales only 17 working days were lost per thousand employees. That would be placed in jeopardy if we were to go back to the bad old days of industrial strife and of the winter of discontent under the previous Labour Government.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Will the Secretary of State advise the Welsh Development Agency, in its efforts to attract new investment, to be a bit more circumspect about whom it assists? Mady Gerrard, formerly of New York, when trading as GG International Ltd., left behind a trail of debts and then went into liquidation. With the full backing of the WDA, she is now back in business. Is that fair to all the small companies, especially in south Wales, to which she owes a lot of money?

Mr. Hunt: I wish that the hon. Gentleman would not cite one example in trying to prove his case. He referred to small companies. I am pleased to be able to announce this afternoon a package of 41 projects by small companies throughout Wales, involving the investment of more than £11·7 million, leading to the creation of more than 400 new jobs. That shows that it is not just major inward investment projects that deserve and receive help. The WDA and the Welsh Office also give outstanding support to small businesses.

Mr. Morgan: If the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) would take off their rose-coloured spectacles for just a moment, they would see that a wave of bankruptcies is passing through Wales—like Sherman marching through Georgia. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the recession is now going so deep and cutting so far into the heart of Welsh industry and employment that it will take us several years and a change of Government to recover?

Mr. Hunt: Not at all, and the hon. Gentleman should not talk down the Principality. Wales is weathering the worldwide recession far better than many other parts of the United Kingdom and the world. I am especially pleased to be able to announce today a £5 million investment by Smiths Crisps in Swansea. That is just another example that shows how well Wales is doing in terms of inward investment.

Mr. Frank Field: Is the Secretary of State aware of the disappointment felt in my constituency at his Department's decision to refer the Hamilton oil project to a public inquiry? Does he accept that many of my constituents—shipyard workers, in particular—feel that the Government have caved in to pressure from one or two well-heeled environmentalists, putting their demands above the needs of the long-term unemployed in Birkenhead and the surrounding area? Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that he might be able to counter some of those fears if he expedited the public inquiry? Is he in a position to tell the House how quickly the public inquiry is expected to report?

Mr. Hunt: I cannot comment on the merits of the proposal, which is formally before me for decision under planning law. I recognise, however, that the proposal raises issues whose significance is not merely local, and there have been a considerable number of representations both for and against it. In those circumstances, the holding of a public inquiry offers the fairest, speediest and surest way of dealing with the decision. I am happy to announce that arrangements are now in hand to hold an inquiry commencing on 12 May. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the final decision on the application will be issued as soon as possible after the inspector's report has been received and considered.

Sir Anthony Meyer: I echo the point made by the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field).

Is not my right hon. Friend's forceful presence in the Cabinet the main reason for inward investment in Wales? Does he agree that, if devolution has the consequences that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) predicts, there will be no voice in the British Cabinet arguing for the kind of conditions that have produced massive inward investment in Wales?

Mr. Hunt: I agree with my hon. Friend. I believe that Wales gains considerably through the office of Secretary of State and from having a seat in the Cabinet. I know that the Liberal Democrats have conceded that their proposals for a Welsh assembly would mean the abolition of that post. It is about time that the Labour party came clean and explained why the Leader of the Opposition, having once been so implacably opposed to devolution for Wales, is now in favour of it. The position of Secretary of State is a

great asset in securing inward investment, and it is about time that the Labour party came to terms with the results of their devolution proposals.

Mr. Barry Jones: We all celebrate the success of inward investment, which is crucial for Wales. We also remember that it was a Labour Government who first created the Welsh Office and then the Welsh Development Agency.

Will the Secretary of State concede that the recession is one of the deadliest—and of the utmost seriousness—in respect of the Welsh economy? Whether on the M4 or the north Wales expressway, there appears to be a march to the dole with a loss of more than 2,500 jobs already this year. I hope that the Secretary of State is aware of the redundancies announced by employers in Wales, including British Steel, British Aerospace, Allied Steel, Ford, BP, Ferranti, Marconi, Ferrodo, National Power, Trecwn and Brawdy in Pembroke, Royal Worcester, Christie Tyler and South Wales Electricity. Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that he has no policy or strategy or, in Government, the will to deal with those pressing problems? He will lose parliamentary seats in Wales because he has no policies to tackle unemployment.

Mr. Hunt: As the hon. Gentleman points at me and says that I will lose, I must inquire gently why the Labour party has not yet been able to put up a candidate against me in my constituency. As for the hon. Gentleman's doom and gloom, he is rapidly becoming well known as the agony aunt for Wales. He is an amateur merchant of doom and his comments were a forecast of the kind of problems that Wales would have if ever the Labour party were to win the general election.

Welsh Language

7. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the percentage increase in real terms on expenditure on the Welsh language since 1978-79.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Direct Government grant support for the Welsh language has risen from £0·35 million in 1978 to £7·6 million in 1992-93. That represents an increase in real terms of 669 per cent.

Mr. Butler: Do not those figures show a dramatic increase in support for the Welsh language since the last Labour Government? What level of indirect support is there for the Welsh language?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Those figures cover assistance provided through part of the education system and to voluntary organisations. My hon. Friend is quite right, however—more support is given to the language through the education system than those direct grant amounts would indicate. For example, there is £3 million by way of grant under the GEST—grants for education support and training—programme. There is also the Government's very extensive support through their arrangements for the Welsh television channel S4C.

Mr. Rogers: Will the Minister be a little more gracious than his hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) and acknowledge the tremendous efforts of Labour-controlled authorities in south Wales and the valleys in respect of the Welsh language over many years? Will he remind his hon. Friend that making the Welsh language a political football does a disservice to that language? How can a county like Mid-Glamorgan, which provides enormous support for the Welsh language through primary, secondary and other areas, pay its teachers the new pay award, which will cost the county £1·7 million, when the amount of Government grant will be only £700,000 and a shortfall of £1 million will thus have to be found from the poll tax payers of Mid-Glamorgan, which will mean £3 per head on the poll tax and the county will be capped for introducing that? Can the Minister advise the local authority how to get out of that dilemma created by the Government?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am, of course, grateful to the local authorities for their assistance and support for the Welsh language, and I do not think for a moment that my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) or anyone in this House is seeking to make a political football out of the Welsh language.

With regard to teachers' pay, I am sure that the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) is as delighted as I am that the teachers have been given an increase of 7·8 per cent. He will also be delighted that the local authorities' standard spending assessments were increased by 8·1 per cent. by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Government have given £3·5 million additional money to local authorities in Wales so that they can meet the necessary increase and give the teachers their well-deserved rise.

8. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will introduce during the next three months a Welsh language Bill to give the same status to Welsh and English in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The wide-ranging legislative proposals presented by the Welsh Language Board have called for very careful consideration. To this end, the Welsh Office has been consulting other Government Departments which would be affected. My right hon. Friend is weighing carefully the views which have been expressed, with the intention of announcing a decision on this matter as soon as possible.

Mr. Howells: First, I should like to put the record straight, as the Secretary of State misled the House in saying that it was our party's policy to do away with the Secretary of State's office if our devolution proposals are accepted. That is not true.

Secondly, I am very disappointed with the Minister of State's reply, as I am sure that the majority of people in Wales will be, too. Will the right hon. Gentleman assure the people of Wales today that he will introduce such legislation before the next general election and that the same status will be given to the Welsh language as that given to the English language in Wales?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is not treating the question as seriously as he should. It is all very well for any party, such as the Labour party, to pledge that it will legislate for a Welsh Language Act, without actually spelling out what is to be in that Act. I for one, and my right hon. and hon. Friends, will not commit ourselves to saying that there will be such legislation without knowing precisely what will be put into that legislation. I have said that we are considering the matter most carefully and the proposals that were put before us, and we shall announce our decision in due course.

Mr. Michael: The Minister of State is already practising for opposition. The only choice in the election will be a Labour Government, because the Labour party has firm commitments. We have said that in our first year we shall bring legislation before the House, and we have said what we shall put in it. The right hon. Gentleman's continued suggestions that we have not described the contents are untrue.

Why has the Minister of State advised three Secretaries of State not to proceed with a Welsh language Bill when for a year there has been a consensus as a result of the publication of the measure by the Welsh Language Board? Why have the Government wasted a year, when a Welsh language Act could have been on the statute book by now? The Conservative party has revealed itself to be bereft of ideas and has failed to do the service to the Welsh language that could have been done by publishing a Bill a year ago and bringing it through Parliament this year.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The so-called supplementary question that we have just heard, which was really a statement, is typical of the slapdash, inconsiderate attitude of the Labour party toward a very serious issue which concerns not only Welsh speakers but non-Welsh speakers in Wales. The hon. Gentleman does not do justice to the proposals put forward by the Welsh Language Board. We are giving those proposals very serious consideration indeed.

Job Losses

9. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to collect statistics on the number of jobs lost to Wales by outward divestment.

Mr. David Hunt: None, Sir.

Mr. Flynn: Have not the three Welsh Office Ministers become the three unwise monkeys of Wales, who neither see, hear nor talk of unemployment, but hide from it, ignoring the jobs lost through outward divestment? Hundreds of those are in Newport and Llanelli. The Government distort the figures by counting 50,000 people twice, but through all the fiddles comes the truth—that in Gwent 20,000 people are out of work, which is 10 per cent. of the work force. Do we have three monkeys or three cheetahs?

Mr. Speaker: I imagine that that is spelt "ahs".

Mr. Hunt: That is a very silly question about a very serious problem. Of course there are difficulties being faced by firms throughout the Principality—we make no secret of that—but according to the statistics, Wales is doing considerably better than many other parts of the United Kingdom and the world in weathering this worldwide recession. The hon. Gentleman should pay attention to the facts.

Income Statistics

11. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give figures for *(a)* the percentage of people on retirement pensions as a proportion of the total adult population in Wales, *(b)* the number of families in Wales entitled to child benefit and *(c)* the percentage of employees in Wales earning under £20,280 annually.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The answer is *(a)* about 23 per cent., *(b)* about 350,000, and *(c)* about 90 per cent. Before the hon. Gentleman asks his usual supplementary question —no, the people of Wales would not be better off under a Labour Government.

Mr. Hain: Is the Minister now aware that the recent figures provided by the House of Commons Library showed that only 2·5 per cent. of the population in Wales would be detrimentally affected by Labour's tax and national insurance policies, whereas 52 per cent.—including pensioners and mothers in receipt of child benefit —would benefit, in some cases substantially? Why do the Government not come clean and admit that, whereas Labour's tax policy would benefit the vast mass of people in Wales, the Government's policies would benefit and protect only a tiny privileged minority?

Mr. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman clearly has not looked at the record of the last Labour Government. Between 1974 and 1979, Labour increased income tax by 3p in the pound. Income tax is now 8p in the pound less than it was then. A man on average income with two children would pay £1,000 per year more under Labour. That is £20 a week. The people of Wales have not forgotten that. Nor have pensioners forgotten that under the Labour Government pensions rose by an average of 0·6 per cent. per year in terms of average total incomes. Pensions have risen by 3·3 per cent. per year under the Conservatives. That is more than the total of the last five years of the Labour Government.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Clergy Payments

28. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what additional payments by the Church Commissioners are made to clergymen and women bearing the title of prebendary or canon; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The Commissiones pay the stipends of two residentiary canons at each mainland English cathedral except Oxford, at a rate some 20 per cent. higher than the national average for a rector or vicar. There are other clergy bearing the titles of canon and prebendary who do so in an honorary capacity and do not thereby receive additional payments from the Commissioners.

Mr. Greenway: Do my right hon. Friend and the Church Commissioners have any part in the payment of the salary of stipend of the small number of lady canons whom I understand to exist? Are there any plans to create canons out of people in holy orders of either sex who are only deacons?

Mr. Alison: Yes, there is a proposal before the General Synod which will enable women deacons to be appointed canons and they would therefore come within the ambit of the possible payment by the Church Commissioners, but the measure enabling such deacons to be appointed as women canons would have to pass through this House before it becomes law.

Mr. Frank Field: Will the Commissioner confirm to the House that when that measure came before the

ecclesiastical committee there was overwhelming support for it and that the committee's view was that, whatever the fate of the women priests measure, the measure to allow women deacons to become canons would give a career structure to women deacons within the Church?

Mr. Alison: I am happy to confirm that. The hon. Gentleman will remember that the General Synod representatives reassured colleagues who were uneasy about the notion of appointing women canons that, unless the ordination of women was accepted by the General Synod, women canons would not be able to preside over or administer the sacraments in the cathedrals.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that there is sufficient differentiation between the payment to a canon and that to a curate, bearing in mind the substantial additional responsibilities that a canon bears?

Mr. Alison: I will certainly consider the figures that my hon. Friend mentioned. The differential between the top and the bottom of the clergy and episcopal salary is a sensitive question which is considered regularly and frequently. My hon. Friend may well have a point that should be considered. I will certainly see that her unease is conveyed to the appropriate quarters.

Agricultural Property

29. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what is his current estimate of the total of agricultural property held by the Church Commissioners.

Mr. Alison: As at 31 December 1991, the commissioners' agricultural portfolio consisted of about 154,000 acres, mostly let farmland.

Mr. Flynn: Does the commissioner accept that following the vote on Friday it is likely that within a short time there will be a total ban on fox hunting, stag hunting and hare coursing in Britain? Does he believe that the commissioners should lead by example in banning such barbarous activities on their land?

Mr. Alison: No. It has always been the practice in the Church Commissioners' holding of agricultural property to reserve the right of hunting not to the landlord but to the tenant so that the tenant, on the basis of his own conscience or attitude to hunting, can decide whether to let the hunt across the land.

Mr. Tredinnick: Is my right hon. Friend aware that that reply will be welcomed in many rural communities, who feel that the campaign against hunting has been wildly misrepresentative and that fox hunting is the most humane way to control the fox population in the country?

Mr. Alison: I voted in the same Lobby as my hon. Friend—I think that he was there on Friday—so I have some sympathy with what he says, but I repeat that the decision whether a hunt can cross a let farm of which the Church Commissioners are the landlord is entirely at the discretion of the tenant.

Women Deacons

30. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what is the total number of women ordained as deacons in the Church of England as at 1 January.

Mr. Alison: On 1 January 1991, there were 674 ordained women deacons in the full-time stipendiary ministry.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. Will he ask the Church Commissioners whether they would be willing to assess—and then publish the results of the assessment—what would be the benefit to the Church in terms of personnel availability if women were able to proceed beyond the diaconate to become priests? As a matter of full-time ministry personnel provision for the Church, has that been considered and if not could it be so?

Mr. Alison: It is a slightly hypothetical speculative variant on which to give a clear answer off the cuff, and while awaiting the progress of the measure, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that although the number of male clergy continues to fall, and has fallen each year for some years, the total of men and women taken together has risen from 10,641 ordained clergy in 1986 to 11,052 last year, so the impact of women deacons is tending the make the total number of clergy go up, whereas the total number would fall if there were a single-sex ministry.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Buildings and Works

31. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what steps are being taken by the Commission in preparation for the transfer of responsibility from the Property Services Agency for buildings and works.

Mr. A. J. Beith (on behalf of the House of Commons Commission): A Director of Works—Mr. Henry Webber—was appointed in July 1991 to head a new Directorate of Works within the Serjeant at Arms Department to undertake the responsibilities formerly exercised by the Department of the Environment. A memorandum of understanding was agreed with the authorities of the other place in November 1991 to regulate the share of the costs of the works directorate between the two Houses. Appropriate estimates for parliamentary works for the next financial year were recently presented by the House of Commons Commission and on behalf of the other place. The Parliamentary Corporate Bodies Bill, which provides for the transfer of property and other legal rights and responsibilities to the two Houses, was presented on 7 February. Subject to the satisfactory progress of this Bill, the transfer of responsibility for all works services to the two Houses is expected to be achieved at the beginning of April.

Mr. Dalyell: I ask the hon. Gentleman a question of which I gave him notice a fortnight ago. Can Mr. Webber do anything about the intractable problem, probably 50 years old since the bombings, of the difficult but nevertheless shame-making stone rot in the Crypt, which

is extremely embarrassing for anyone who shows visitors with any knowledge at all around the Palace of Westminster?

Mr. Beith: I went to have a look at the problem myself, mainly in the Baptistry area, and I know that the Public Works Office has been busy with it for some time and that the hon. Gentleman has brought the matter regularly to its attention. It is not within the province of the Commission and the authorities of the House until the beginning of April, but the authorities looking after it in the Department of the Environment are well aware of the concern and we intend to make sure that the matter is properly considered.

WALES

Advisory Council for Wales

12. **Sir Anthony Meyer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for an advisory council for Wales.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): I am continuing to discuss the idea of establishing an economic forum with interested parties.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Will my right hon. Friend say a word about the consultations in which he has engaged with the other political parties in Wales and with Welsh local authorities, including those under Labour control?

Mr. Hunt: The proposal was put to me by the Council of Welsh Districts at a time when the Council was under Labour control. Its position has been maintained since the change of control, and I am considering the proposal very seriously.

Let me just say to the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) that if my earlier assumption that the Liberal Democrats would abolish the Secretary of State for Wales was incorrect, I apologise and am happy to accept what he says. The question of the economic forum, however, does not relate in any way to proposals for devolution.

Business Investment

13. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he now has to stimulate business investment and attract quality jobs for the Monmouth travel-to-work area.

Mr. David Hunt: The Welsh Office, the Welsh Development Agency and other Government agencies operate a wide range of measures to stimulate business investment and to attract quality jobs in all parts of Wales.

Mr. Edwards: Perhaps one of the measures that the Secretary of State could introduce would be the granting of assisted area status to the Monmouth travel-to-work area. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that a delegation was preparing to meet him with a document, which has involved a considerable amount of work, to present the case for such status? The people of Monmouth, and the members of Gwent county council, Monmouth borough council, Monmouth town council and Monmouth chamber of commerce, are especially disappointed that the Secretary of State has refused even to meet the delegation. What other proposals does the right hon. Gentleman have?

Mr. Hunt: I am aware of the case that has been prepared by Monmouth borough council and I was very interested to read the report that it produced to support its case.

We announced in 1988 that no change would be made in the current composition of the assisted area map during the lifetime of this Parliament. Since I received the council's submission, however, a number of additional points have been made to me and I am happy to announce that I have agreed to meet a deputation to discuss business investment in the area. The subjects discussed will include assisted area status.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Office Security

32. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what recent discussions he has had to improve security for Members' property when left in their offices.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I have frequent discussions on security matters with the relevant authorities. It is most important that Members report any theft to the Serjeant-at-Arms as soon as these incidents occur.

I am glad to be able to inform the House that, since Christmas, there has been a considerable reduction in the number of reported thefts. As I have often said before, the amount of property stolen would be considerably reduced if valuables were secured and desks and filing cabinets locked when offices are left unattended.

Mrs. Mahon: Has the Lord President had any discussions with the security services? If so, is he satisfied that they are not once again trying to smear Opposition Members, as they have done in the recent past? Will the right hon. Gentleman take the matter seriously? We all know from "Spycatcher", and the amount that the Government spent trying to suppress it, that what I have described took place.

Mr. MacGregor: I have not had discussions with the security services specifically about theft, but I have had such discussions with the relevant authorities. Let me say very clearly that I have found no evidence whatever to support any of the allegations of which I have read. I believe that they are entirely unfounded.

Sir Peter Hordern: Is my right hon. Friend aware that no one has stolen into my room to remove the secrets held by my computer about the forthcoming election in my constituency? Is that because the people concerned know something that I do not?

Mr. MacGregor: I doubt it, since, so far as I am aware, no one has stolen anything from me either. I am sure that such people would be fascinated to read of the wide range of constituency cases on my computer.

Business of the House

33. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make it his practice that all parties represented in the House by hon. Members who have taken their seats are included in consultations by him as to the business of the House.

Mr. MacGregor: No. The present arrangements are of long standing, they work well, and I see no need for change.

Mr. Hughes: The right hon. Gentleman has undermined his growing reputation as a fair-minded and modernising Lord President. Will he consider his answer again, and grasp the old nettle? Given that only two parties—the Government and the Labour party—are now formally involved in consultations, and given that in electoral terms all parties in the House are minorities——

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): No, they are not.

Mr. Hughes: All the parties are electoral minorities. In the light of that, is not the only fair-minded and democratic way of conducting our business to allow it to involve all properly represented parties in the House of Commons throughout the United Kingdom?

Mr. MacGregor: The discussions take place between parties which represent the vast majority of the hon. Members in the House. Setting the business of the House is a complex process and final decisions are often taken at a late stage. I do not believe that it is practicable to consult all eight minority parties represented in the House and I do not know what we should do with another minority party in the guise the hon. Members for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) and for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields). The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) will know that the minority parties are given a chance to make representations about business of the House and are informed of it. I think that that is the only sensible and practical way to deal with the matter.

Mr. Winnick: As virtually everyone seems to have been informed that the general election date will be 9 April, could not the Leader of the House ask the Prime Minister to make an official statement this week confirming that date?

Mr. MacGregor: I can only say that the hon. Gentleman knows something that I do not.

Dr. Cunningham: Why is the right hon. Gentleman being so coy? We all know that the Government have a timetable for an election on 9 April. Even the *Financial Times* has told us that the Prime Minister has booked his aeroplane for that date. Since we now have almost weekly guillotine motions and the Government are intent on railroading legislation through the House, why can the Government not make an announcement so that we all know where we are? The country would then know what the Government's intentions are, much of the business which does not have widespread support in the country could simply be junked, and we could get on with the election.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. There is widespread support for Government legislation and for those matters on which we have had timetable motions. I have been under pressure to get on with the legislation because many people want to see it in place.

On the other matter that the hon. Gentleman raised, all that is being done represents good contingency planning for the election date, whenever that might be.

Annunciator

34. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the replacement of the Commons annunciator system.

Mr. MacGregor: The existing annunciator system is obsolete and is extremely expensive to maintain. Modern receivers have been installed in No. 1 Parliament street and No. 1 Derby Gate, which provide Members with access both to the annunciator system and to a range of public service television channels. Similar facilities will be made available in the new Members' offices in Speaker's Court. The House of Commons Commission has recently approved expenditure on further work to develop new data and video networks, which would replace the existing annunciator system with a wider television system by early 1994 at the latest.

Mr. Coombs: I am sure that the House will welcome the Lord President's implicit recognition that the present annunciator system represents outworn and outdated technology which will soon have to go. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is entirely desirable that hon. Members should be able to watch the proceedings of the Chambers in their offices at any time, the better to be able to follow what is happening? At present, that is not possible. Is it not ironic that the rest of the country can obtain cable television to watch our proceedings while we can still not do so in our offices?

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend will know, part of the problem lies in the difficulties of putting in a cabling system in the older parts of our complex, particularly in the Palace. That is something on which we are receiving advice from consultants. Fitting cables is relatively easy in the new offices, but the clean feed to which my hon. Friend refers is a matter for the House. The Select Committee on Broadcasting, &c. is currently considering whether to make its own recommendations to the House.

Scottish Affairs Committee

35. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will take steps to nominate the Scottish Affairs Committee.

Mr. MacGregor: No. The hon. Member will appreciate that there has been no change in the circumstances preventing action in the current Parliament.

Mr. Dalyell: Is it not deeply unsatisfactory that there is no Select Committee to consider the views of the Scottish police on Lockerbie, which are deeply different from the stated views of the Foreign Secretary and of the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg)? Furthermore, is it not deeply unsatisfactory that there is no way of interrogating the Lord Advocate on the evidence that he says he has in relation to Libya? With the trial of the two men taking place this very day in Tripoli, will the right

hon. Gentleman as a senior member of the Government undertake that before any sanctions or military action are pursued by Her Majesty's Government there will be a proper report to Parliament?

Mr. MacGregor: The second part of the question is outside the scope of the original question relating to the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. On the first part of the question, both those matters could be considered by other Select Committees. For reasons that the House knows, we have been unable, throughout the earlier part of this Parliament, to reach an agreement about separate consideration by a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. This Parliament has, at most, only a few months to run and it is therefore not appropriate to set up such a Committee now.

Mr. Bill Walker: Is my right hon. Friend aware that we would have had a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, if that Committee had not attempted to produce a report which did not reflect accurately the evidence received by the Committee? That is why some hon. Members like me refused to serve on it. We did not want to be party to those activities.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend refers to one of the difficulties that we had earlier.

Sir David Steel: Does the Leader of the House accept that as the Scottish Office is not under scrutiny by a Select Committee, it is the only Department of state to be unscrutinised? Because of its multiple responsibilities, is not the Scottish Office already less answerable to the House than are English Departments of state? In view of that, will the Leader of the House give some support to the debate next Monday in the Scottish Grand Committee, where the Constitutional Commission's proposals will be before the Committee?

Mr. MacGregor: It was my right hon. Friend who recommended not only the debate next Monday but that two others should take place on devolution and other issues. Clearly, I am keen for that debate to take place. It will enable the country to have a better view of all the issues involved in the proposals currently under discussion.

Westminster Hall

36. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement about the future use of Westminster Hall.

Mr. MacGregor: The control of Westminster Hall is vested jointly in the Lord Great Chamberlain and the two Speakers on behalf of the two Houses. The principles governing the exercise of their discretion to grant the use of the hall for non-parliamentary functions are that such events should be either a royal occasion, a ceremony in honour of a head of state or one having clear connections with Parliament or the hall itself.

Mr. Hain: In the Lord President's reply to me about tea facilities for visitors, he said that provision could be made in St. Stephen's tavern. Surely Westminister Hall would provide an ideal arena for that. It would be a people's hall instead of a cold, draughty cavern, and visitors could have tea and cakes without having to go in and out of security when they visit us. That would be an appropriate use for the hall. Will he put that to the relevant authorities for consideration?

Mr. MacGregor: That is outwith the principle that the relevant authorities have laid down. The Catering Committee is considering two consultants' reports on the architectural feasibility and management implications of converting the premises of the former St. Stephen's tavern into a refreshments facility for Members' visitors. If that goes ahead, it will provide an extra facility.

Early-day Motions

3.33 pm

Mr. Speaker: I wish to make a short statement about early-day motions. In recent days, I have had referred to me a series of almost identical early-day motions which Members have sought to table. In considering the action to be taken, I have borne in mind the rule for questions, which lays down that questions are inadmissible if they are "multiplied with variations on the same point".
Hon. Members will find that ruling in the 21st edition of *Erskine May*, page 294.

I have decided that it would be in the best interests of the House to apply the same rules to the tabling of early-day motions. Without such a rule, there would be a danger of the order paper being misused, not least during the period before a general election. If I am satisfied that the series of motions submitted are multiplied with slight variations on the same point and thus constitute a campaign, they will not be printed.

RECHAR

3.34 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Peter Lilley): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the European regional development fund.

I am pleased to announce that, following discussions with Commissioner Millan, the European Commission has said that it will release the money—about £121 million—due to the United Kingdom under RECHAR programmes. The Government will continue to maintain proper control over public spending. We will make it clear that priority will be given to projects funded from the European regional development fund, and we are taking steps to secure better value for money by increasing competition for Britain's share of the fund.

To achieve this increased competition, the Government want to encourage application for ERDF money from a wider range of United Kingdom spending authorities, including grant-aided bodies. Organisations such as British Coal Enterprise, UDCs and regional enterprise agencies make a valuable contribution to regional development. We are therefore initiating new arrangements which will place them on an equal footing with local authorities.

The Government have representatives on the partnership programme committees which decide on the allocation of European regional development grants. Those representatives will press for greater attention to value for money. The composition of the programme committees will also be reviewed to take account of the wider range of applicants.

To contribute to the RECHAR programmes, the Government will shortly be announcing new business support measures of our own to assist small firms in coalfield areas.

The present system for public expenditure control will remain unchanged. European regional development fund receipts have always been taken into account in determining forward expenditure plans which are in consequence higher than they would otherwise be, but in future published expenditure plans will show forecast receipts separately for each expenditure programme. The Commission has said that this will meet its requirements for transparency and enable it to be satisfied that the European regional grants have a genuine economic impact in the areas concerned. It will demonstrate that public expenditure cover will be clearly available for forecast ERDF expenditures. We shall be discussing with the Commission ways in which the present arrangements for forecasting structural funds expenditures can be improved.

The new arrangements will be introduced at the first opportunity. They will be applied in the 1992 round of expenditure discussions and will thus be reflected in expenditure plans from 1993-94 onwards. RECHAR receipts will, of course, begin to flow in the near future. Transitional arrangements will be made to provide public expenditure cover to accommodate this.

The House will be pleased to know that the threat to future regional fund receipts has been removed, the block on RECHAR funds has been lifted, and that the coal mining areas will receive the money to which they are entitled. The implementation of the RECHAR programmes can now proceed immediately.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Everyone will welcome the fact that the Government have now abandoned their plans—*[Interruption.]* Everyone will welcome the fact that the Government have now abanndoned their plans to divert European grants intended for Britain's coalfield communities to other areas, including keeping down the poll tax in Wandsworth and Westminster. The Government were caught with their hand in the till. The principled stand of the European Commissioner, Bruce Millan, has ensured that this RECHAR money will be invested, as was always intended, in creating new jobs, better training and a better environment in areas where Government policy has meant that mines have been closed.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that RECHAR money will go to the coalfield communities, including former coalfields such as west Cumbria, and nowhere else? Will he confirm that local authorities which receive RECHAR funds will not face reductions in their capital or revenue allocations by the Government? Will he confirm that this is what Commissioner Millan and the coalfield communities wanted all along? Would it not have been better to agree all this in the first place so that the RECHAR money would already be creating jobs, instead of which we have had a ludicrous 18-month delay followed by this humiliating climbdown?

Is it not true that the Government have accepted Commissioner Millan's requirement that, from 1993-94, RECHAR, and other regional grants, shall be separately identified in allocations to local authorities? Importantly, will the increased allocations to the RECHAR-receiving authorities be offset by reductions in British Government allocations to all local authorities, or will this be new money? Is it not true that the release of RECHAR money in 1992-93 is conditional on the Government's agreement not to allow local government spending rules to reduce the benefits to the mining areas?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the British Government, who are trumpeting the RECHAR decision as a triumph, played absolutely no part in setting up the RECHAR fund which will bring an extra £121 million to coalfield communities? Is it not true that the Government's position has been, in their own words, "positively neutral"?

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that his belated acceptance of the European rules for regional funds to which Britain signed up in 1988 justifies the view of the Secretary of State for the Environment that what the Government were trying on was no longer viable, and that what has been announced today is plain contrary to the Prime Minister's assertion that Commission Millan was in the wrong?

As Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, will the right hon. Gentleman now turn his attention to reducing the need for RECHAR in future? Has he noted that British mines have been closed while coal imports rise to levels that severely damage the balance of trade; and that, unless some change is made, Britain will soon be importing more than 30 million tonnes of coal a year? Will he press his colleagues to abandon their stupid and short-sighted plans to reduce Britain's 52 collieries to just 14, throwing 40,000 miners out of work and leaving Britain dependent on coal imports? Would it not be better to keep British mines open?

Why does the right hon. Gentleman accept this rundown of the British Coal industry, which is twice as efficient as any coal industry in the European Community? Would he countenance the rundown of any other industry that was twice as efficient as its German counterpart—if there is such an industry left in Britain?

Finally, is the climbdown over RECHAR the first step towards ending the Tory party's mean-minded vendetta against British miners, their families and the coalfield communities? If it is, the about-turn on RECHAR will be doubly welcome.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) clearly does not understand the contents—*[Interruption.]*

Mr.Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman began by saying that he welcomed the announcement and then made it clear how disappointed he was by the release of the RECHAR money. The fact is that there never were any plans to divert this money elsewhere: it was always going to the coalfield communities. The proof of that is that the delays in releasing the money have delayed programmes in the coalfields. The sooner the money is paid over, the sooner those programmes can go ahead.

I can confirm that there will be no reductions in other funds to local authorities; there never were any, and none was ever intended under the existing arrangements.

It would have been better if these arrangements had been agreed earlier and the Commission had released the money earlier. We have sought throughout to be as positive and co-operative as possible, and we have sought to make our arrangements as transparent as possible. I am delighted that this has at last been accepted by the Community.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the release of RECHAR moneys in future. I can assure him that there will be transitional arrangements to allow for the fact that moneys which ought to have been spent this year will be carried forward into future years, and that extra provision for expenditure in those future years will have to be made.

The hon. Gentleman said that we played no part in setting up RECHAR. I remind him that the structural funds were set up at the behest of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister of the day in 1972-73.

The hon. Gentleman said that we ought to reduce the need for RECHAR in future. I can assure him that we are making the pits in this country into the most efficient coal mining industry in western Europe. That is the best guarantee for their future. I would ask the hon. Gentleman to confirm the admission of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) that at no point has any Opposition Front Bench spokesman pressed Commissioner Millan to speed up the release of these funds, which we wish had been released earlier.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that it will not be in vain for me to ask hon. Members to ask questions about RECHAR and not to make electioneering points.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): Many congratulations are in order to my right hon. Friend for showing the European Commission the error of its ways in releasing our money for our hard-pressed coalfield areas. Commissioner Millan is as popular in Sherwood as the sheriff of Nottingham. He has denied my constituents the

opportunities for new job creation and leisure facilities. Does my right hon. Friend agree that at no time has the European Commission had any reason whatsoever for withholding our money?

Mr. Lilley: I think that congratulations are due to my hon. Friend for the vigour with which he has consistently pursued the interests of his constituents and of this country in seeking the early release of this money. I am glad that his voice as well as mine has been heard in the Commission. It is not in the interest of this country that I should stir up problems with the Commission at this stage, but I note the point that my hon. Friend has made. I think that it will be recognised as valid by his constituents and by people throughout the coal mining communities of this country.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will every penny of this RECHAR money be additional to what the Government had originally intended to spend in these areas, will local government spending and capital limits prevent any of the money from being spent in this or future years, and is any credit due to the Secretary of State for the Environment for changing this Secretary of State's mind?

Mr. Lilley: The answer to the first question is yes and to the second question no. The answer to the third question is that my right hon. Friend and I are always in accord on all matters.

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): Will my right hon. Friend accept that I warmly welcome the statement that there are no more problems now on either side of the channel regarding the RECHAR distribution? Can he tell me, however, to whom the money will be paid? Will it be paid to a Government Department, or direct to the recipient who is due to receive it? Can we be assured that there will be absolutely no delay in disbursing the money?

Mr. Lilley: It is funnelled through central Government, but I can assure my hon. Friend that there will be no delay. I believe that we shall also have co-operation from the Community for the speedy release of this money, and its transmission through, as soon as the particular projects are agreed.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): When the money is paid to each local authority, will it be listed in the *Official Report* showing what authority it has been paid to, when it has been paid, and how much?

Mr. Lilley: I will certainly consider that request, but it has not been the practice up to now.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that this country puts about £300 million into this kitty, that it is therefore clear that the £121 milllion we are now receiving is indeed our own money, and that Labour Members would have done much better over the last 18 months if they had worked with hon. Members on this side of the House to get that money to this country instead of bolstering their own socialist appointees in Europe?

Mr. Lilley: In fact, this country pays into the structural funds something like £300 million more than we are entitled to draw out, even after allowing for the excellent Fontainebleau rebate which improved the situation very considerably, compared with that left by the last Labour Government. However, I can assure my hon. Friend that we shall do all that we can to enhance the amount of money that we receive from the fund whenever we have reason and claim to do so, and that we shall also do all we can to ensure that it reaches the communities concerned as rapidly as possible.

Mr. Terry Patchett (Barnsley, East): Does the Minister agree with me that there is nothing like the prospect of a general election to make a Minister address his mind to his own faults?

Mr. Lilley: I had thought that the imminent approach of a general election might make it seem wise to those who sit on the Opposition Front Bench to support the British Government in securing the early release of the money. The fact that they did not do so probably shows poor judgment electorally, but certainly it shows a lack of loyalty to the coal mining communities.

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): May I join in congratulating my right hon. Friend on the persistence and success with which he pursued these elusive funds from Brussels? I remind him that he secured them on exactly the same terms that Bruce Millan would have sought when the was Secretary of State for Scotland.

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, on 22 January, Bruce Millan said that he would be prepared to consider additional funds, over and above the £120 million, specifically for Yorkshire in the light of the recent announcement of 1,100 redundancies, affecting particularly Kellingley and Whitemoor colleries in my constituency?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's remarks. I assure him that I will press for additional funds wherever there is evidence of additional job losses after the original requests were made. That will, of course, include his constituency and the areas that he has just mentioned.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Is the Secretary of State aware that the coal mining communities of Wales that were being cheated of £19 million will welcome this belated decision? Will he give a firm assurance that, in relation to all future EC funds, the Government will adhere to the principle of additionality and, in particular, that there will be no clawback of money issued to rural authorities in Wales under the LEDA programme, which is now under question?

Mr. Lilley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that this will be particularly welcome in Wales, which has many areas suitable for RECHAR funds. Moneys will continue to be additional, and we have always insisted that they should be. This makes it absolutely transparent that they are and will continue to be additional, so there is no question of clawing back.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that this decision will be very popular in Scotland, particularly in the coalfields that require recharging, which is what the money is for? Is he further aware that Scottish people have been totally amazed that the Labour party, which aspires to form the next British Government, should constantly attack the British Government for trying to get our money back to carry out projects in our constituencies?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is quite correct. There will be much scepticism about the position that the Labour

[Mr. Lilley]

party has taken—not only the parliamentary Labour party but a number of Labour-controlled local authorities. To be fair, some realised that they were cutting off their noses to spite their faces and were only too anxious to seek a settlement. They will be delighted that one has been achieved, and that will be particularly true in Scotland.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Is the Secretary of State aware that, as one who was a Scottish Office Minister with Bruce Millan, I have always considered that Bruce Millan was the finest Secretary of State that Scotland has had in the post-war years? Is the Secretary of State further aware that, even in 1992, I still believe that Bruce Millan is the finest Secretary of State, because, by battering some sense into the thick heads of Ministers and by forcing the Government into this position, he has done more for Scotland than the three Tory Secretaries of State that we have had in the past 13 years and the conveyor belt of junior Ministers who have wrecked Scottish industry? Bruce Millan is in the process of rebuilding our industry.

Mr. Lilley: I have considerable respect for Commissioner Millan, and I am sure that he has respect for the hon. Gentleman, who, as a Scottish Office Minister, was responsible for administering the very system to which Commissioner Millan has been objecting. He would have been responsive to a plea from the hon. Member for early release of the money, and I am sorry that it was not forthcoming.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the much-needed £5 million Lancashire programme can now go ahead, and that it is no thanks to the Labour party that the Government have been able to get back what was our own money in the first place?

Mr. Lilley: Agreement will have to be reached on specific projects, but as soon as it is, the money will flow through and, I hope, go to the project in Lancashire that my hon. Friend mentioned.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the delay occurred because of the stupidity of the Government's policy? In view of the 18 months time-lag that has taken place, will he inform us what time scale will now be involved for schemes that will come about as a result of the Government's climbdown?

Mr. Lilley: We would have liked to achieve settlement a long while ago. I had a meeting with Mr. Millan in the company of my fellow Secretaries of State who are involved in the issue, and we sought to achieve agreement back in May. We thought that we were within a hair's breadth of getting it then; only the issue of transparency was identified by him. Consequently, things slipped back. Now that they are settled, we should welcome it.

The second part of the hon. Gentleman's question was, how soon would the money flow through? As soon as individual projects receive agreement, money will come from the Community and at this end, the Government will not impede the flow of that money to the relevant projects. I can assure him of that.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): Will my right hon. Friend accept the congratulations of his right hon. and hon. Friends and, in fact, of all fair-minded people? Now that my right hon. Friend has made this breakthrough, will similar or the same rules apply to all regional development grants—for whatever purpose—coming from Europe?

Mr. Lilley: That is quite correct. All European regional development fund moneys will be separately designated in the public expenditure accounts, but we shall, of course, in all cases retain overall control of public expenditure, so not only RECHAR but all ERDF moneys will be treated in this way. That is why the threat of withholding that money as well as RECHAR money has disappeared.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Is not the Secretary of State aware that, while he has dodged and delayed, the Deep Navigation pit in my constituency and Penallta next door have been closed, leaving us with the huge problem of unemployment as well as that of clearing up the mess left behind? Will he give us a categorical assurance that, as RECHAR was meant to serve directly the needs of the mining communities, the money will be directly spent in the communities where jobs have been lost?

Mr. Lilley: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we have neither dodged nor delayed. We have had every interest in getting the money back into this country. After all, throughout this period we have to continue to pay our contribution to the Community. We wanted the money to come back and I can assure him that, now it is to be released, it will flow individually to the projects in constituencies such as his where it should be and where it should have been all along.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): Will my right hon. Friend stop beating about the bush? Is it not the case that an unelected Commissioner in Europe with a loyalty to the European Commission has been trying to withold funds contributed to RECHAR by the taxpayers of this country? Is it not the case that my right hon. Friend has tried time and time again, month after month, to ensure that what should go to coal-mining areas gets there? Is it not a simple straightforward fact that the Commissioner has tried to prevent it and that my right hon. Friend has tried—ultimately successfully—to get the money back to the mining areas of this country?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend will know that I am a compulsive moderate in these matters, so I would not put it in quite the same language as he does. He is right to recognise that the British taxpayer puts very large sums of money into the Community. Naturally, there is much stronger feeling when any delay is incurred in our share, which is only a minority of that money, coming back to this country, and delight when it finally comes through as it has now done. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): When the Secretary of State next meets Commissioner Millan, will he convey to him the grateful thanks of coalfield authorities such as that in St. Helens for his splendid victory over the long-running, mean-spirited intransigence of the British Government? Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Government have been holding on to substantial ERDF sums for a considerable time? Will he consider repaying to

authorities such as St. Helens the debt charges that they incurred in honouring schemes which they have had to fund because of the lack of funds from his Department?

Mr. Lilley: One gets the impression that the hon. Gentleman would almost have preferred the impasse to endure longer. We have managed to persuade the Commission to release the money. It will come through and will go to local authorities, which will deal with the problem that he mentions.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): Will my right hon. Friend reflect that, in spite of his great success today in ensuring that the Commission backs down from its absurd stance on the matter, and although the British Government included my constituency in the RECHAR programme, the Commission took my constituency out of the programme? Will my right hon. Friend address the matter again today, so that the money can come into my constituency in Nottinghamshire? Will he also reflect on the great pity that, throughout this long-standing saga, the Labour party never sought publicly to attack Commissioner Millan to ensure that he made the money available to this country?

Mr. Lilley: I assure my hon. Friend that I shall give close consideration to his request to make representations on behalf of the coal mining areas in his constituency. Any arguments that I can deploy to that effect I will deploy, and I will try to get funds to flow to his constituency which may be additional to those about which we are talking today. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's remarks.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): May I welcome the statement by the Secretary of State today? Will he take a keen look at my constituency of Blyth Valley, in which, over the past five or six years, we have lost thousands of mining jobs?

Mr. Lilley: I offer the hon. Gentleman the same assurance that I will look at the matter, and that I will see what programmes are designated for his constituency and whether there is a case of further funds to be sought.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Does the Minister accept that the vexed question of additionality has run for a long time? Does he also accept that, like his Government, the previous Labour Government had the problem firmly on their plate? Will he now tell us that, for all time, this hideous corpse has been buried and that, in future, we shall get our own money back for the schemes that it is appointed to finance?

Mr. Lilley: I am afraid that we have not buried the concept of additionality, which, as the hon. Gentleman says, is a difficult one, because it involves determining what would have happened if what did happen had not happened. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we seem to have got agreement in the area. The threat to British money being paid back to us has receded, which is as much good news for Northern Ireland as it is for all other parts of the kingdom.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): May I put a straightforward question to the Secretary of State? Does he accept that the principle that underlies all regional funding in Europe is that it is additional to Government spending to harmonise living standards between the richer and poorer regions of Europe and that it should not be treated as a subsidy to existing Government expenditure? If it is, it undermines the purpose. Will he now tell the House that he at last accepts the principle of additionality?

Does the Secretary of State agree that a similar serious mistake was made when signing the Maastricht treaty and agreeing to set up a cohesion fund for transportation and the environment, in that no region of the United Kingdom will get a penny out of that fund? That is especially damaging to a region such as Northern Ireland. After the channel tunnel, it will have more serious transportation problems, because it will be the only part that has no land link with the rest of Europe.

Mr. Lilley: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that we have always accepted the principle of additionality in respect of Community funds, and it often features in other programmes. As I should have mentioned to the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), the STRIDE programme funds which affect Northern Ireland are also being released. I note the right hon. Gentleman's point that we should not have signed the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. Hume: I did not say that.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): As the 1988 regulations to which the Secretary of State referred called for the doubling of structural funds compared with the 1987 level by 1993, is it true that the Government believe that that will lead to no increase in the British allocation of funds? Do the Government agree with the Commission's proposal that the allocation of Community structural funds should be completely separated from other central Government allocations in the United Kingdom public expenditure system? As that is one of the most important points of principle for us for 15 years, will the Minister give us an answer—yes or no?

Mr. Lilley: I can confirm my hon. Friend's point that, although structural funds are to be double what they were in 1988, we do not expect that to lead to any increase in real terms in disbursements to the United Kingdom. That is one reason why the dispute about additionality arose. The regulations said that additional funds flowing from the doubling should be reflected in additional expenditure in the United Kingdom, over and above the normal additionality inherent in the way in which we accounted for that all along. As we were not to receive any additional funds, we found it rather difficult to display that those non-additional funds were additionally being spent. That difficulty, which I described as metaphysical, has now been resolved, and we are back in the world of the substantial.

On the second point, we are simply separately designating as a separate line in respect of ERDF funds for each programme in the public expenditure counts. That is not very different from what we have done in respect of the European social fund moneys, so it is not so much of a precedent as my hon. Friend fears.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): May I congratulate the Secretary of State on his grovelling apology to Commissioner Millan, who has acted correctly throughout? I also thank the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs, who, by his presence today, admits that he was wrong in his legal interpretations on RECHAR. Two questions that I would wish to ask—[HON. MEMBERS: "One."] One question that I would wish to ask is this: now that the Secretary of State has lost my

[Mr. Derek Enright]

constituency a considerable number of jobs through this delay, will he make it clear to us what discussions took place with Commissioner Millan on the Court of Auditors report, published last December, which rebuked Commissioner Millan for his laxity in not having placed sufficient requirements on member Governments? Are there now sufficient requirements under the Court of Auditors report published on 13 December in connection with structural funds?

Mr. Lilley: If the hon. Gentleman has been hearing grovelling apologies, he has been hearing voices and should seek attention in the appropriate quarter. He should let us know whether he made any representations in an attempt to have the money released earlier. If not——

Mr. Enright: I did, Sir.

Mr. Lilley: In that case, the hon. Gentleman deserves the respect of Conservative Members. He is almost alone among Opposition Members in having done that. Certainly no Front-Bench Member did it, and I congratulate him. As far as the Court of Auditors report is concerned, it always seek financial, but not, I think, doctrinal, rigour.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, having served on the Regional Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, I know only too well how mean the Labour Government —including Mr. Millan—were? Does he further accept that, when the European development fund was discussed in the European Parliament last week, a mere 13 Labour Members were present? The rest thought that nobody could see them and did not bother to turn up.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend's knowledge of these matters is second to none. She has told the House an important fact, which reveals that the Opposition shed crocodile tears not only in this House but in Strasbourg. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for revealing how little concern Labour Members really have about Britain getting a fair return from European funds.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The Secretary of State has referred specifically to increasing competition and expanding the number of organisations that may apply for ERDF funds. Will he tell us when he will be publishing the new arrangements, how the information will be disseminated, what qualifications, if any, will be placed on the type of organisation that may apply and how he will ensure that there is a co-ordinated strategic approach by any area in receipt of such funds, given that, in Scotland, at least, our regional authorities have a major responsibility for strategic planning, which we would not wish to be undermined?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady makes an important point, and homes in on something to which we may not have devoted enough attention today. One of the key features of the arrangements that have been brought in at our initiative is to increase the number of organisations that can compete for the given amount of money from Europe so that we can choose the best projects from a wider range and obtain the best value for money. We shall be announcing guidance on how to do that as soon as possible.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is rather sad to hear sounds of regret from the Opposition that such a good and sensible agreement has been reached? Is it not a good thing and would it not be better for the Opposition to recognise that at long last a Secretary of State has come here with good news about a good story about a good settlement?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend highlights a tendency on the Opposition Benches to believe that what is good for Britain is bad for Labour. The Opposition respond in a way which shows that that is their basic feeling here as in economic matters.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I was delighted to hear the Secretary of State's statement of the high regard in which he holds Commissioner Millan. Will he here and now repudiate the disgraceful aspersions cast on the integrity of Commissioner Millan over the withholding of RECHAR funds, and will he give a commitment that he will call on his right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to immediately withdraw the scurrilous accusation that Commissioner Millan has been acting out of party political considerations?

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is noted for his fastidious language. It is inconceivable that he would have said anything implying that. If any aspersions are due, they should be cast on those Labour Members and Labour local authorities which put pressure on Mr. Millan to prolong the withholding of that money.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): What impact will additional RECHAR money have on district councils in coalfield communities in respect of their capital allowances and standing spending assessments? Will North-East Derbyshire be able to move up from being 335th of 336 district authorities in terms of standard spending assessments per poll tax payments?

Mr. Lilley: The money will be transmitted effectively to local authorities through borrowing approvals rather than through standard spending assessments to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I cannot tell him how that will affect individual local authorities, but I will happily try to get my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to transmit that information to the hon. Gentleman when it is available.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I am grateful for the statement from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. However, he could have made that statement earlier. It clarifies the situation: there are now two wallies in the Cabinet. After the fight that we have put up, how much of the RECHAR money will go to Nottinghamshire, bearing in mind that the Nottinghamshire Tories supported the Government in blocking the money going to the areas where it was needed?

Mr. Lilley: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I have the same high regard for him as he has for me. He may have failed to realise that his Conservative colleagues from

Nottinghamshire were among the most vigorous in seeking the early release of that money. I believe that quite significant sums will go to Nottinghamshire and will benefit the coalfield communities in those areas, which will probably return more Conservative Members at the next election.

Mrs. Sylvia Heal (Mid-Staffordshire): In welcoming today's announcement, which is long overdue for the people of mid-Staffordshire and elsewhere in Staffordshire who desperately need the money to regenerate the local economy, I must ask the Secretary of State to confirm that, as a result of the announcement, there will be no reduction in the general level of Government expenditure in 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Mr. Lilley: I entirely agree with the hon. Lady's remarks. Far from there being a reduction in Government expenditure, because of the transitional arrangements necessary to accommodate the expenditure delayed from this year and deferred and passed over into next year, there will be slightly higher spending than would otherwise have been the case, because we will accommodate that expenditure which has unfortunately been delayed by the withholding of the money until now.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Would the Secretary of State confirm that the money which will come to St. Helens, as the last two coal mines have closed in the past five years, will come as quickly as possible, as we have many thousands of people who need to be put in work and who formerly worked for the coal mining industry?

Mr. Lilley: I shall certainly do all that I can to bring that about.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is not the Secretary of State telling the House rather a lot of porkies today?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that we will not have that word. It escaped my notice last week. I had to look it up in the dictionary, but now that I know what it means, the hon. Member should please withdraw it.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: In so far as you and the House know what I mean, Mr. Speaker, perhaps I could proceed. Is not the truth to be found in the leaked Heseltine letter? It says:

"We cannot afford such an own goal in areas which are politically important to us."

West Cumbria was important to the Government. That is why they have caved in.

Mr. Lilley: I do not comment on leaked drafts, but I will comment on Cumbria. I can understand the insecurity that the hon. Gentleman feels. This measure will be welcomed in the coal mining areas in that part of the world. They will note that little pressure has been exerted by Labour Members to achieve it. It has been achieved by a Conservative Government, and they will be pleased with it.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Since this money is coal-related and, in a sense, pollution-related, will the Government consider with local authorities what could be done in the situation that now arises in Scotland where there is serious evidence from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration that a massive ozone hole—

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a bit wide of the statement.

Mr. Dalyell: No, it is precisely on this matter.

Mr. Speaker: Try and get it in order.

Mr. Dalyell: It is precisely on the point. It is pollution-related. The Scots are now faced, so we are told on page 1 of our national newspaper, *The Scotsman*, with —*[Laughter.]* It is not funny to have 300,000 skin cancer-related cases. That is the possibility. The evidence from NASA is no laughing matter whatsoever. I am asking a serious question. Will Government Departments consider this alarming—*[Interruption.]* If cancer is a laughing matter——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The whole House knows that the hon. Member has a great interest in this serious matter. It would probably be better raised in the Adjournment debate which I have offered the hon. Member, because he would then get a fuller reply.

Mr. Dalyell: I would ask simply for an acknowledgement of the concern of the Department of Trade and Industry in this ozone-hole-related matter.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the distribution of these funds will involve the Scottish Office and mining communities in Scotland? If that is the case, will he impress upon Scottish Office Ministers the need for parity of treatment in the distribution of RECHAR funds and RENAVAL programme funds? Many people in my constituency are deeply unhappy and disappointed with the performance of the Scottish Office in respect of the RENAVAL programme. I hope that mining communities in Scotland are treated better and more humanely than my constituency in respect of the RENAVAL programme.

Mr. Lilley: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that this settlement applies equally to funds flowing through the Scottish Office to Scottish constituencies and local authorities. If he is asking for parity of treatment in the flow of funds from the Community, of course that will exist. On the flow of funds from the taxpayer, there is more generous treatment in Scotland than in other parts of the United Kingdom. If the hon. Gentleman wishes it to be reduced, perhaps he will spell that out a little more clearly.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Surely the Secretary of State should be apologising to the people of south Wales for the scandalous way in which he has blocked all that money —perhaps as much as £30 million—while thousands of jobs have been lost in my constituency and in other mining communities in south Wales. How much money will now come to us, and what will the total be?

Mr. Lilley: The message seems to have been lost in the post as far as the hon. Gentleman is concerned. We have not been blocking this measure; it has been blocked by the Community. That block has now ended, and everybody is satisfied by that. Significant and substantial funds will flow to south Wales coal mining areas via my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Hain: How much?

Mr. Lilley: That will depend on the amounts specifically agreed on specific projects by the Community,

[Mr. Lilley]

but we will be acting to try to get agreement at the earliest possible stage and for the money to flow through accordingly.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): The success of the RECHAR initiative was brought about because local authorities argued with the Commission that some special treatment should be given to the areas in question. The fact that the Minister of State, Department of the Environment was present until a few moments ago demonstrates the need for local authorities and the Coalfield Communities Campaign people to be involved in immediate talks.

Will the Secretary of State assure me that the Coalfield Communities Campaign people will be included in talks about the distribution of RECHAR and the fact that there are further resources to be obtained? It is because of Labour-controlled authorities that we have got this far. Can we have further support for the initiative, with the co-operation of local authorities, in distributing the funds and requests for further funds to help rundown coalfield community areas?

Mr. Lilley: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that local authorities will continue to play their part on the committees that oversee the programmes.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): The Secretary of State talks about victory, but is it not true that today we have seen a victory of all the scale and dimension of Dunkirk? Does the Secretary of State remember Churchill's words, that victories are not composed of evacuations and withdrawals? Rather than talking about having moved the Commission, will he apologise to people in my community in Harthill and Shotts, and people throughout Lanarkshire, who have been devastated by coal closures and hit by steel closures for 18 months but have been refused urban aid? Will he apologise for the fact that, for 18 months, the money has been prevented from being distributed to them and he is going to them now only by virtue of the fact that he has withdrawn and the Commission has won? Will he join me and the people of Harthill, Shotts and Lanarkshire in sending our congratulations and those of the whole House to Commissioner Bruce Millan on the fight that he has fought?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. and learned Member——

Dr. Reid: No, not learned.

Mr. Lilley: Well, philosophical—[HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] I withdraw that slur on the hon. Gentleman's character. The hon. and philosophical Member has misheard if he thinks that I have talked about victory. I have assiduously refrained from such talk, so obviously people have drawn their own conclusions. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the sooner that the money can flow through to areas which have been deprived of it the better we will all be pleased. That is what we all want.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I am neither learned nor gallant, as you know, Mr. Speaker.

Is it not true that Cumnock and Doon Valley, which will receive a substantial amount from the RECHAR fund for the west of Scotland, and which now has an unemployment level above 20 per cent., has had its money delayed entirely as a result of the intransigence of the British Government in coming into line with other Governments in Europe, who were happy to accept the rules?

It still worries me that the Secretary of State said earlier that "some guidance" about applications would be issued later. In Cumnock and Doon Valley, the local authority, the enterprise trust and other groups have already put a detailed, comprehensive scheme to the Scottish Office. Can I have an assurance from the Secretary of State that there will be no delay whatever in considering the scheme, so that people do not have to wait any longer than they have already waited?

Mr. Lilley: I can certainly give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. Any guidance will be issued only to those who need it because they have not already learned how to make such applications. We want to encourage the widest range of organisations to put forward projects so that we get the best choice of schemes to which we can allocate the money.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I thought that the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) had a point of order. *[Interruption.]* We have not yet reached that stage. I believe that Ms. Quin wishes to ask a question on the statement.

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): The Secretary of State used the statement to announce changes to the way that European funds that are not connected with the additionality dispute with the European Commission would be administered in future. He mentioned the increased competition for funds that he was hoping to establish. Can he assure us that those areas that do not win competitions will not be abandoned, and that the criteria by which areas are judged to be eligible for European funds will be based on need, not simply skill in filling in applications or succeeding in certain competitions?

Can the Secretary of State assure us that the measures set out in his announcement will not weaken the role of local authorities in European funding? He said that he wishes to widen the composition of the programme committees to urban development corporations and others. Can he assure us that this will not simply be a way to put his own nominees on committees rather than having elected local representatives who know the needs of their own communities?

As the Secretary of State has given way to the European Commission on the main substance of the additionality dispute, will he take the opportunity, as my hon. Friends have asked him to do, to make a public apology to Commissioner Millan for the way that his integrity has been impugned over the past year? Several of my right hon. and hon. Friends referred to the timing of this decision and of the Government's climbdown. Surely the electorate would be wiser to trust the Labour party, which has campaigned for the release of these funds all along under the terms that Commissioner Millan wanted and which were of direct benefit to the areas concerned, and to realise that the Government have proved themselves untrustworthy in this matter.

Mr. Lilley: I can assure the hon. Lady that there is no change in the eligibility rules for areas, projects and

programmes, which are essentially Communitywide. We are trying to encourage more organisations to apply within those rules for funds. I can assure her that there is no question of removing from the committees that organise these funds existing local authority members and other members.

As to an apology, I think it best just to express the delight of the House that the money has been released, and the hope that it will move speedily to the areas where it is required to help those who are afflicted by coal-mining rundown.

The hon. Lady concluded by referring to the Labour party having campaigned for this money. That is what it has conspicuously failed to do. It sought to make a party political point out of this. It refused ever to make representations to the Commission on behalf of the coal-mining areas and it has shown a two-faced response to the good news that the money is being released. That good news is the message of the day, and that is the response that we shall see on the ground in the areas that we all care for.

Points of Order

4.27 pm

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I take points of order, may I say that there are two three-hour debates, which are timed, and a further debate of an hour and a half, in which many other hon. Members wish to participate, so I hope that points of order are on matters with which I can deal?

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have the Government made a request for the Secretary of State for the Environment to make a statement about the National Audit Office report, which shows that the taxpayer forked out over £2 billion too much for the disastrous water privatisation, and that the then Secretary of State for the Environment made secret £2 million payments to companies handling privatisation?

Mr. Speaker: I have had no such request, but I understand that the Public Accounts Committee may look at this matter.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During questions on the statement, an allegedly leaked letter was prayed in aid in support of an argument. My concern is that the Labour health spokesman, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) has clearly, we all now know, organised industrial espionage and theft so as to get the information used——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): What about Waldegrave's PPS?

Several Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me deal with this, please. The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) must not make such an allegation against an hon. Member. He should withdraw the word "theft".

Mr. Hughes: On your instruction, Mr. Speaker, I withdraw the word "theft". The point that I am making is that somebody close to the hon. Member for Livingston is plainly implicated in this. Should not the hon. Gentleman explain to the House how he comes by these documents so regularly? Is it not an abuse of the House that the hon. Gentleman comes to the Opposition Despatch Box and uses that information, and uses it deliberately to mislead?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not say such things. He has now been in the House for the duration of a full Parliament. Will he please put himself in order, and withdraw that last comment?

Mr. Hughes: I shall change it to "inadvertently to mislead".

Mr. Speaker: That is almost as bad. In any case, I think that the whole House would deprecate the use of leaked information, whatever its source.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker—the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes). May I seek your advice? That was at least the third occasion on which I have heard the hon.—well—Gentleman name an

[Mr. Allan Rogers]

Opposition Member on a point of order. You pointed out to him, Mr. Speaker, that it would be normal courtesy, and decent of him, to inform the hon. Member concerned before naming him. I realise that we are in the middle of the lead-up to a general election, but for the hon. Member for Harrow, West to keep on doing this contravenes all the protocols and courtesies of the House.

Mr. Speaker: I hope very much that at all times, but especially just before a general election, hon. Members will adhere to the conventions of the House, which are of long standing and enable our business to proceed in good order.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, which has nothing to do with the preceding points of order.

As the Comptroller and Auditor General is an officer of the House, Mr. Speaker, will you ask him to speed up the publication of the National Audit Office report on the accident and emergency service—especially in view of the fact that the position at the Worcester royal infirmary has now become so bad that two doctors are reported to have resigned in protest?

Mr. Speaker: I shall need to look into that matter. I shall be in touch with the hon. Gentleman about it.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): On a very short point of order, Mr. Speaker, may I revert to what my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) said earlier? A leak, as I understand it, is generally accidental. What should we call information that is not given accidentally—information that is given deliberately to the House?

Mr. Speaker: It is not for me to say. As I have said, I deprecate the use of such information on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I shall be brief, but I regard this as important. I am addressing you in your role as Chairman of the Speaker's Conference—which, as you know, deals with electoral matters—rather than in your role as Speaker.

It probably escaped your notice, but, at the weekend, a very senior member of the Scottish National party suggested in Scotland that no one over the age of 35 should be allowed to vote in the forthcoming general election in that country. That would not affect me; I should still be able to vote. What would your attitude be, however, if such an outrageous suggestion were submitted to you on behalf of the SNP—if it were proposed that all the old-age pensioners in Scotland, and all other people over 35, should be disfranchised?

Mr. Speaker: As it happens, that piece of information did escape me. Last weekend, I paid a visit to Ulster—which I thoroughly enjoyed—so I do not know about the matter that the hon. Gentleman has raised; but he said "if the suggestion were submitted", and it has not been so submitted.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As a Scottish nationalist over the age of 35, may I assure you that there has been no such suggestion? The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) should not believe everything that he reads in certain newspapers.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the kindest thing that I can say is, perhaps that was another leak.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Further to those points of order, Mr. Speaker. May I say that your visit to Northern Ireland was widely welcomed? All parties in the House were represented at your reception, and we wish you and your good lady well. Let me remind you that you are the only Speaker who, as yet, has not thrown me out of the House: I appreciate that.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman—but I think that we had now better move on.

European Economic Area

[Relevant documents: Fourth report from the Trade and Industry Committee (House of Commons Paper No. 347 of Session 1989-90) on trade with EFTA and the Government reply contained in the Committee's third special report (House of Commons Paper No. 666 of Session 1989-90).]

4.34 pm

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the proposals described in the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry on 30th December 1991, relating to the draft Agreement on the establishment of a European Economic Area; and supports the Government's view that the Agreement should be entered into by the Community and its Member States subject to agreement on amendments to the draft necessary to deal with incompatibilities between the draft and the Treaty of Rome identified by the Court of Justice in its Opinion 1/91.

The creation of the european economic area is a major step forward for the Community. It will bring significant economic gains to British industry and British consumers. The Government very much welcome this major agreement and look forward to signature within the next few weeks.

What we shall be signing is the most ambitious and wide-ranging agreement entered into by the Community. It will extend the main principles of the single market to the seven European Free Trade Association—EFTA—countries. I remind the House that those are Austria, Finland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

A single market of 19 west European Countries stretching from the Arctic to the Mediterranean will be created. It will cover the "four freedoms"—free movement of goods, capital, services and people. It will also cover related matters, ranging from agriculture to co-operation in research and development.

This debate is particularly timely. Last Friday, the Commission and EFTA negotiators made a declaration that the EEA negotiations had been successfully concluded. The next step will be formal initialling of a text by the negotiators this week. We expect the final text to be ready for signature by member states and the EFTA countries next month, allowing their Parliaments to ratify by the end of the year.

The declaration by the negotiators was made in the light of agreement last week on amendments necessary to meet the concerns about the EEA expressed by the Court of Justice. Those amendments affected the competition and institutional provisions of the EEA—I will describe the new version of those provisions in some detail later.

I know that it is not ideal to debate the agreement when we do not have a text before us. I hope that the full explanatory memorandum that I submitted will go some way towards making good the absence of a text.

It might help if I first describe the contents of the agreement and the benefits that the Government believe that it will bring to the United Kingdom and to the Community. I will then describe the institutions of the EEA, referring briefly to some of the amendments that were agreed last week to deal with the problems arising from the opinion of the Court of Justice on the agreement.

The first and perhaps the best known of the four freedoms is free movement of goods. When the United Kingdom left EFTA to join the Community in 1973, the Community established free trade agreements with the remaining EFTA members. Under these free trade agreements, there is already tariff-free trade between the Community and EFTA in industrial goods and processed agricultural products. The EEA improves free movement of goods in a number of important respects.

There will be common technical regulations. The community and EFTA already work together in creating common European standards, but each side maintains its own technical regulations for purposes such as health and the environment. Those different regulations amount to a significant barrier to trade, as the Select Committee on Trade and Industry recognised in its report.

The Community and EFTA technical regulations have much the same objectives, but they achieve those objectives by different means. Under the agreement, EFTA will adapt to follow the methods used in community measures.

Manufacturers in the EEA will therefore have to follow only one set of regulations instead of a possible eight sets now. A major barrier to trade with the EFTA countries will be eliminated.

The agreement also eliminates other important non-tariff barriers to trade. Perhaps the most significant of those are the prohibition of discriminatory taxation on goods, the application within EFTA of rules on open public procurement based on Community legislation and the adoption of common rules on intellectual property. Those provisions will tackle some of the main potential types of discrimination against exporting companies. In addition, customs procedures and rules of origin are to be streamlined. That will make the task of the exporter of goods simpler and cheaper.

With those measures on the free movement of goods, the EEA will improve significantly the ability of exporters to trade throughout the 19 countries of the Community and EFTA. There will be a significant advance on existing free trade agreements. British companies will have greater export opportunities, and British consumers will benefit from lower prices and more choice.

For a market to be truly open, it must have rules that ensure fair competition. One of the most important parts of the agreement is that on competition and state aid. The EFTA countries will take on competition and state aid rules based on those of the Community. Those will include rules on restrictive practices and monopoly abuse. In addition, the EC merger regulations will cover the Community and EFTA.

The competition and state aid rules will be enforced by the Commission and a new independent EFTA surveillance authority with powers based on those of the Commission, with appeals going to the European Court of first instance or the EFTA court.

The adoption of similar rules by the Community and EFTA, which will be enforced by two independent authorities, will be a crucial element of the EEA. The conditions for competition throughout the 19 countries will be substantially improved. That will obviously benefit consumers. It will also help companies, which will no longer have to face a wide range of substantially different rules, and the agreement will lead to an open and competitive market throughout western Europe.

Unlike goods, services are not covered in the existing free trade agreements between the Community and EFTA. The agreement will lead to the free movement of services. The rules on services will be based on article 59 of the

[Mr. Tim Sainsbury]

treaty of Rome and the related secondary legislation. So the agreement will eliminate restrictions on the freedom to provide services within the EEA by nationals of the Community and EFTA who are established within the EEA. The services covered include transport, telecommunications, audio-visual services and financial services.

That freedom to provide services throughout the area is a major achievement. It will create new opportunities for businesses in which Britain, in particular, has traditionally been strong. That is so especially in financial services, where the EEA will adopt rules based on Community legislation on insurance, banking and securities. For example, British banks will enjoy a single "passport" to carry out business throughout the area.

The agreement also goes beyond the existing free trade agreements in providing for the free movement of capital. There is already comparatively free movement of capital between the Community and EFTA. The main advantage in enshrining the current practice in rules based on Community law will be that most restrictions by EFTA on inward investment will be lifted.

The fourth and final freedom provided for by the agreement is the free movement of persons. The agreement creates the right of EC and EFTA nationals to work throughout the EEA.

An essential element of the free movement of persons is the right of establishment, which will apply within the extended European area.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the Minister outline the position of immigrant workers long domiciled in the European Community? Would gastarbeiter in Germany, for example, be given the privilege of free movement throughout all the countries incorporated in that economic area?

Mr. Sainsbury: I was referring to the right of establishment, which applies essentially to Community and EFTA nationals who will be able to operate as self-employed persons anywhere within the area covered by the agreement. They will be able to set up and manage undertakings under the same conditions as local nationals and they will be able to establish branches and subsidiaries.

There will be mutual recognition of professional qualifications throughout the EEA. Professionals such as lawyers, doctors and accountants will be able to practise in another country within the EEA without the need to re-qualify.

Those elements will form the basis of an area throughout which people will enjoy considerable freedom of movement—to work, establish businesses and carry out their professions. That will be to the advantage of British nationals who wish to move within EFTA.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Is the Minister saying that nationals of Finland, Sweden or one of the EFTA countries will now be able to arrive at Heathrow and be allowed in with no restrictions or inquiries, provided that they have a passport for the country in which they are living?

Mr. Sainsbury: No, that is not what I was saying. I was referring to the right to carry out one's profession, the mutual recognition of professional qualifications and the right for self-employed persons to set up in business. We are dealing with economic activity, not travel as such.

In addition to provisions essential to the four freedoms to which I have referred, the agreement also covers many related provisions. Examples are those on consumer protection, environment, statistics and company law.

There will also be increased co-operation between the Community and EFTA in Community programmes in a number of fields, such as research and development; information services; education, training and youth; small and medium-sized enterprises; tourism; and the audio-visual sector.

EFTA has also agreed to adopt measures to assist the poorer regions of the Community. The most important of those measures is a fund that will be set up and financed by EFTA. It will consist of 500 million ecu in grants, which will be given during a five-year period. In addition, EFTA will provide an interest rate subsidy of 3 per cent. on 1·5 billion ecu of loans.

The regions that will benefit from the fund will be Northern Ireland, Greece, Portugal, the Republic of Ireland and specified areas of Spain. The Government fought hard to ensure that Northern Ireland would be a recipient of assistance from the fund.

Mr. Denzil Davies: How are "poorer regions" to be defined? Why is a region like Wales, with gross domestic product per capita almost as low as Northern Ireland and the lowest in Britain, excluded?

Mr. Sainsbury: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that there is an agreement within the Community on the areas that qualify. Those areas qualify under the agreement, as under other Community arrangements.

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): Did the Government make out a case to the European Commission and EFTA to include help for other areas that have experienced industrial decline, such as Wales, north-east England and Scotland?

Mr. Sainsbury: During the negotiations, the argument was whether the same areas should qualify under those special arrangements for the European economic area agreement as qualified under other European Community arrangements. We fought hard to ensure that Northern Ireland was included in the "cohesion arrangements". They are not meant to cover small areas where there may be a problem—*[Interruption.]* I am not referring to Wales as a small area, but the hon. Lady seemed to suggest that a town where a major employer had closed should be included in the agreement.

Ms. Quin: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Sainsbury: If the hon. Lady will excuse me, I must get on, because this is a time-limited debate. I expect that she will have an opportunity to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and make her point then.

One of the most important subjects covered by the agreement is fish. The EEA does not extend the common fisheries policy to EFTA, but the agreement and separate exchanges of letters that have been negotiated in parallel will provide for reductions to tariffs on fish and fish products and for increased access for British and Community vessels to EFTA waters.

Tariff reductions will apply to a very wide range of fish species on a progressive basis. This will clearly benefit British consumers and processing companies. It is important to note, however, that tariffs on three species of particular sensitivity to United Kingdom producers will not be affected. These are herring, mackerel and salmon. The Government fought hard and successfully against strong demands from EFTA that tariff reductions should also apply to those species.

Dr. Godman: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Sainsbury: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be brief.

Dr. Godman: I shall be brief. Under the terms of the agreement about fish, Spain and Portugal are given access to grounds in which they have no history of fishing. Why is that?

Mr. Sainsbury: I suspect that the hon. Gentleman knows that that was the result of long and hard negotiations and formed part of the cohesion aspect of the negotiations under which the poorer countries of Spain, Greece, Portugal and the Republic of Ireland sought compensation for admission to the agreement of the relatively rich EFTA nations. Part of that cohesion consisted of the loans and grants to which I just referred, and part was in the form of fish. The important point for the House is that British fishermen will benefit from greater access to Norwegian and Icelandic resources.

The Community share of the total allowable catch for north Norway cod under the existing EC-Norway agreement will be increased from 2·14 per cent. to 2·9 per cent. The United Kingdom receives about two-thirds of that share. On current estimates of the total allowable catch—the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) is knowledgeable on this subject—the United Kingdom will receive more than 6,000 tonnes in 1993, which is nearly double the 1991 quota.

In addition, fixed amounts of cod in Norwegian waters will be allocated to Spain, Portugal and Ireland as part of the EFTA package for the poorer regions. Iceland will provide a small additional quantity of red fish. The allocation of this will be decided by the Community in due course. The United Kingdom has made it clear that it wants its fair share of this Icelandic fish.

The arrangements on fish were extremely difficult to settle. The industry is of special importance to a number of EFTA and Community countries, including, of course, Britain. Given the sensitivity of the sector both here and in other countries, I believe that the deals struck on tariffs and resources are good for Britain. We have protected from tariff reductions the species that are most vulnerable to increased competition from EFTA, and we have obtained a guaranteed share and an increase in the resources available to our fleet.

Before leaving the main sectors covered by the agreement, I should mention agriculture. Under the agreement, the EFTA countries will not participate in the common agricultural policy, but there will be a number of tariff reductions on agricultural products. Some of those reductions will be reciprocal. Others will be unilateral reductions by the EFTA countries on products from the poorer regions of the Community as another part of the EFTA measures for poorer regions.

This account of the main contents of the EEA makes it clear that it covers a wide range of sectors. For the EEA to lead to a level playing field across these sectors, or as near a level playing field as can be achieved, it is necessary to have an adequate institutional structure. The main political body of the EEA will be the EEA council. The council will consist of Ministers of the Community member states and the EFTA Governments plus the Commission. It will be responsible for political direction of the EEA.

Under the EEA council, there will be an EEA joint committee consisting of officials of the Commission, member states and EFTA countries. The joint committee will be the main forum for day-to-day co-operation between the two pillars. The two main functions of the joint committee will be to adopt new EEA rules and to settle disputes.

New EEA rules will be based on new Community legislation. There will be informal consultation between the Community and EFTA during the passage of Community measures. The aim will be to ensure that these measures are adopted in such a form that EFTA can accept the measures as EEA rules, but the Community will retain the ultimate right to legislate as it sees fit.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree with Mr. Edward Morton, a gentleman whom I have not had the pleasure of meeting but who writes learnedly in the *Financial Times*? Mr. Morton states:

"The EEA offers them"—

EFTA countries—

"a consultation process so that they can be under no illusion that the actual decisions will be taken anywhere else than in the EC Council of Ministers with such input from the European Parliament as the Maastricht summit might allow."

That is right, is it not?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend is correct, and I suspect that it is for that reason that some EFTA countries have applied to join the European Community.

The original intention of the Community and EFTA was that an EEA court would play a key role in settling disputes between the two sides. The Court of Justice ruled that such a court was incompatible with the treaty of Rome. There was agreement last week that, instead, the joint committee should settle disputes.

If a dispute concerns interpretation of an EEA rule, the two sides can agree to have the matter resolved by the Court of Justice. The Joint Committee will be able to take other measures to deal with the problem, including possible suspension of the relevant part of the agreement, or rebalancing measures. It will also be possible for certain limited procedural matters to be referred to arbitration.

EFTA will create two new independent bodies to ensure the good functioning of the agreement by EFTA states. There will be an EFTA surveillance authority with enforcement functions and powers similar to those of the Commission. There will also be an EFTA court, which will be responsible for matters such as infraction proceedings brought by the EFTA surveillance body and competition cases arising within the EFTA pillar.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Does the fact that the European Parliament has called for the new agreement to be again submitted to the Court of Justice make any difference?

Mr. Sainsbury: I hope that it will not be submitted and that all 19 countries will be able to ratify the agreement in time for it to come into force on 1 January 1993, which is the firm intention of the participating parties. We would not want anything to obstruct that arrangement, which is clearly to the benefit of Britain.

As within the Community, it is not enough simply for the EEA states to agree to adopt common rules. If the extended market is to have value, the rules must be implemented and enforced properly. The EFTA surveillance authority and the EFTA court will ensure that that happens.

I opened by saying that the EEA was perhaps the most ambitious and wide-ranging agreement to be entered into by the Community. The agreement will create a market of 380 million consumers, responsible for almost half the world's trade. It will lead to benefits for consumers and companies throughout the 19 countries. It will provide for closer co-operation between the Community and its closest European neighbours. For Britain, it will provide new opportunities for our exporters and benefits for our consumers. It will bring more fish to our fishing fleet and new funds to Northern Ireland.

The creation of the European economic area is a substantial contribution to the Government's objective of developing a Community that is open, outward looking and market oriented. It will facilitate accession to the Community by the growing number of EFTA countries that wish to apply, and it will ensure that trade within western Europe is based upon the principles of an open market economy that we hope will extend one day throughout the whole of Europe.

4.58 pm

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): On behalf of the Opposition, I welcome the progress that has been made towards the establishment of the European economic area. We strongly approve of ever-increasing co-operation between the countries of the European Community and the countries of EFTA. That seems to me and others to make great sense in today's world and it will help to solve some of the trading—and other—difficulties between the two groups.

As the Minister pointed out, a huge market is hereby created—the biggest in the world. About 380 million people are involved in the wider European area; a tremendous amount of trade is also involved. There is great interdependence between the two trading blocs. Trade with the European Community amounted to some 56 per cent. of all EFTA exports last year, and EC exports to EFTA amounted to about 60 per cent. of EFTA's imports. So the two blocs are closely linked, and this agreement will promote further co-operation and trade between them.

We are talking about countries with which we have much in common and with which we have had a great deal in common for many years. Particularly pleasing to the Labour party is the fact that there are countries in EFTA with very good social and environmental records, as well as good economic performance. The countries concerned are wealthy, and their wealth will certainly be to our mutual benefit. All the countries involved have higher per capita GDP than the average in the EC itself. Perhaps this agreement will finally bring to an end the economic divisions which used to be described as "Europe at sixes and sevens" in the days when the European Community numbered six and EFTA seven.

I pay tribute to the Norwegian Prime Minister, Mrs. Brundtland, for the work that she has done in promoting the agreement. She was involved in discussions with the Commission president in 1988-89, and those discussions were one of the important stimuli for the conclusion of this agreement.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Would the hon. Lady also like to praise the excellent work of the Conservative party in Norway, which has done a great deal to ensure that the negotiations have continued successfully?

Ms. Quin: I understand that there has been quite a degree of cross-party support in Norway, but for various reasons I especially wanted to mention Mrs. Brundtland.

I am glad that the legal difficulty which seemed so prominent a few weeks ago now seems capable of resolution. It would have been a tragedy if the political and economical desirability of such an agreement had foundered on the legal niceties about which members of the European Court of Justice were concerned. I understand that an unofficial European Commission paper provided the basis for agreement last week. Rather oddly, the paper was called a non-paper—I believe that that is the official description of an unofficial paper in Community parlance. Perhaps another term should have been used.

Be that as it may, I hope that that non-paper has resolved the outstanding difficulty, although I accept the point made a few minutes ago by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) that the European Parliament may want to express concern about the legal arrangements, and that that might prolong the discussions throughout the course of this year. If the European Parliament wants to refer the matter back, I hope that the Governments, the European Commission and the European Parliament will be able to agree to a satisfactory compromise so that the agreement can go ahead and come into operation at the beginning of 1993. Certainly, by far the best time for this agreement to come into force would be the beginning of 1993, when the completion of the internal market is also supposed to take place. It seems only sensible that the two should go hand in hand.

Obviously, the world trading strength of Europe which this agreement represents gives Europe a position of considerable trading and economic power, but I believe that that position also carries with it considerable responsibilities. The Community and EFTA combined need to ensure that their actions promote world trade and do not result in a fortress Europe of the kind that many people, particularly outside Europe, still worry about. Perhaps at the end of this debate the Government will spell out in a little more detail how they see the implications of the agreement for world trade. It remains as important as ever it was that there should be progress on a firm agreement within the framework of GATT. We hope that this agreement will help, not hinder, the progress that must be made towards a successful conclusion of the GATT round.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): While I very much agree with the hon. Lady that it is important to avoid building a fortress Europe, does she agree that the

agreements will assist countries such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland which have been at such a disadvantage for so long and will smooth their eventual entry into the Community—an entry which, although delayed, will be welcome when it occurs?

Ms. Quin: The hon. Lady is anticipating our debate later this evening, when we shall consider the agreements with the countries of eastern Europe, but I certainly agree that helping the countries of eastern Europe and forming trading relationships with them is vital. I certainly hope that nothing in this agreement with EFTA will delay agreement with the countries of eastern Europe—an agreement to which we must attach a high priority, not just for economic reasons but for political reasons and reasons of world peace.

I wish to express some reservations about the Government's attitude to GATT. The Government seem to speak with two voices: the Department of Trade and Industry says that we must reach agreement within GATT as soon as possible, but the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has been defensive about the Community's common agricultural policy and seems to have played little part in agreeing with some of the criticisms of the CAP advanced by the United States and by the Cairns group. If the Government had not antagonised their European partners with their double opt-out at Maastricht, they might have had more success in persuading their European partners to make further progress towards a successful outcome of the world trading negotiations which are so important for our economic future.

Mr. Barry Porter: The hon. Lady is usually extraordinarily fair. On reflection, would she agree that objections to the reform of the common agricultural policies—a reform which is essential if we are to get any agreement on GATT—have come largely from the Germans and the French? I have not noticed United Kingdom Ministers causing any trouble—they are entirely trouble-free people—so will the hon. Lady apologise for what she has just said?

Ms. Quin: I was thinking of the many newspaper articles which appeared a few months ago criticising the Government for their over-loyal attachment to the European negotiating position, especially on agriculture. I should be happy to pass the hon. Gentleman the various press clippings that I have to that effect—they are well substantiated, and they certainly show that the Government have been somewhat over-zealous in their defence of the common agricultural policy, and have not done as much as they should to promote a worldwide agreement.

We need to assess how the agreement bears on the likelihood of EFTA countries which want to apply for full membership of the Community succeeding in obtaining it. There are suspicions that some countries may be unsure about enlarging the Community and may prefer to deepen rather than widen it at this stage. They may feel that this agreement satisfies the countries of EFTA so that we do not have to make progress in accepting into the Community those EFTA countries which have applied for full membership. Will the Government make their position on that clear?

The agreement should not be allowed to slow up the applications of countries which want to become full members of the European Community. As they meet the criteria for full membership, they have every right to submit their applications and to have them dealt with sympathetically and speedily. That applies also to the countries in eastern Europe which at this stage are applying for associate membership but which eventually want to become full members of the European Economic Community.

When the Minister winds up, I hope that he will give us a few more details about what the agreement means in terms of benefits to the EFTA countries and what changes the EFTA countries may, as a result, have to introduce. We know that certain EFTA countries have rules regarding outside investment that make it difficult for companies in Britain and other parts of the European Community to invest there. I hope that the Minister will supply a few more details about whether there will be any remaining hurdles. I am thinking of the rules in Norway and in other EFTA countries, such as Finland.

We must also think about what the agreement means for us in Britain, particularly in our present parlous economic state. I believe that the Government made a tragic mistake at the European summit at Maastricht last December in opting out of both economic progress and the social chapter. It worries me, therefore, that the EFTA countries—which hope, with the European Community countries, to create this large economic area—may see the United Kingdom as a semi-detached member of the European Community, and may therefore regard this country as a less attractive country in which to invest and as a less certain member of the European Community in future. I hope that the Minister will deal with that issue in much more detail than we have heard up to now.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Surely the hon. Lady recollects that President Delors said that the contents of the social chapter were likely to increase costs in this country and that it was the absence of those costs that led President Delors to say that we would become more attractive for inward investment. Is not the hon. Lady standing logic on its head?

Ms. Quin: I have often agreed with many of the things that President Delors has said in the past, but I do not agree with him about this issue. It is totally hypocritical of the Government to argue for a level playing field and then seek to distort it by means of unequal social conditions which put British workers at a disadvantage.

I hope that the Minister will provide a few more details to supplement those which appear in the explanatory memorandum, which does not clarify the position as much as it ought to do, regarding the different sectors of the British economy and how they are likely to be affected by the agreement.

The Minister rightly mentioned the importance of the agreement to the service sector. I agree that it is important. We may find that our service industries are able to expand in the EFTA countries more easily than they have been able to expand in certain existing member countries of the European Community. As for financial services, great opportunities will open up for us, but I hope that the Government will press the case for the implementation of the consumer directive and consumer safeguards when it comes to financial services within the European Community—something that they have failed to do up to now.

[Ms. Quin]

Have the Government carried out a sector by sector survey of what the effects on our beleaguered industries are likely to be? I understand—perhaps the Minister will confirm it—that certain sectors are not included in the agreement. I understand that coal and steel are excluded sectors. Does the Minister believe that that will be a problem for Britain's coal and steel industries? The shadow Secretary of State for Energy said that British coal is the most economically and efficiently produced coal in the European Community. If the agreement included coal, would it not be possible for our coal industry to look at the EFTA countries as possible future markets? Have the Government carried out any studies or held consultations with the coal industry, both management and work force, about any opportunities that would be available to the coal industry in the EFTA countries?

Can the Minister tell us about the growth areas for our industry as a result of the agreement? Will he comment on the worrying lack of preparedness for the single market that a survey published last week illustrated? Can he say whether the Government intend to look at that lack of preparedness in terms of the agreement with the EFTA countries? It will be important for our industry to be properly prepared not just for the internal market but for the European economic area when it comes into force.

The Select Committee on Trade and Industry made specific recommendations to the Government about helping our industry to prepare for the European economic area. I hope that the Minister will return to that important matter when he winds up the debate.

The Minister rightly referred to agriculture and fishing. Agriculture is not included—happily, the EFTA countries are to be spared having to adopt the common agricultural policy, but fishing is included to a certain extent. When those difficulties between the European Community and EFTA were at their height, it was described as a cash and cod dispute. I am pleased that the United Kingdom is to have increased cod allocations and that its fishing opportunities will be increased somewhat, but I am a little concerned about what rights Spanish vessels may have. They will be fishing in areas where traditionally they have not fished before. Many of us are worried about the huge catch potential of Spanish fishing vessels, particularly if proper conservation measures are not introduced at the same time.

Dr. Godman: Spanish fishing vessels going into Norwegian waters will encounter a kind of policing that they do not encounter in European Community waters. The Norwegians are very tough policemen when it comes to their fish stocks. I suggest to my hon. Friend that little or no fish in Icelandic waters will be offered to United Kingdom fishermen.

Ms. Quin: I accept what my hon. Friend says. It is important that whatever fishing agreement is reached should be properly policed. I regret the fact that policing of our own waters is often inadequate and that that has led to the over-exploitation of certain fish stocks.

My hon. Friends have asked in interventions what the agreement means for people. We have heard that it will promote the free movement of people and the right of establishment between EFTA and European Community countries. My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) referred to the position of gastarbeiter, which was not satisfactorily dealt with by the Minister. I should like him to give an absolute assurance that none of our ethnic minorities, who have sometimes experienced practical difficulties in travelling to other European countries, will be disadvantaged by anything in the agreement and that their interests will be looked after carefully when the agreement comes into force.

As for what the agreement means to the regions of the United Kingdom, the Minister was dismissive of our concerns regarding the cohesion funds and how they might be used to help the regions of the United Kingdom, apart from Northern Ireland. We very much welcome the fact that the cohesion funds will be used to benefit Northern Ireland. I feel strongly about that. None the less, the Minister did not say whether the Government had even put forward the needs of what are recognised in the European Community as regions in need of support: the objective 2 areas, as they are called—the traditional industrial regions that have the experienced economic decline in recent years.

We are not talking about small regions, and I was surprised when the Minister seemed to dismiss my comments as though I were talking about towns and villages. We are talking about Wales, Scotland, the northern region, the north-west, Yorkshire and Humberside, and the west midlands. We are talking, therefore, about a large proportion of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Barry Porter: There is not an awful lot left.

Ms. Quin: In terms of territory, that is true. A large part of the United Kingdom has suffered industrial and economic decline under this Government. We very much want measures to be taken to rectify the regional imbalances.

I believe that the agreement could also represent a great potential for some of our regions, particularly those fortunate enough to face eastward, which will therefore find themselves in a geographically advantageous position in relation to the new combined market of the European Community and EFTA. The north-east hopes to be a bridge between the European Community and EFTA, as it is so well positioned geographically. The same is true of Yorkshire and Humberside, and of eastern Scotland. I hope that the Government will work with those regions to ensure that they make the best use of their economic potential. As the agreement will come into force at the beginning of January 1993, I am comforted by the fact that a Labour Government, committed to regional measures, will work with those regions, to their economic advantage.

What discussions has the Minister held with local authorities and the regions about the potential of the agreement? It may change the geography of Europe and make regions that have become accustomed to thinking of themselves as being on the periphery feel that they are more central to European developments in the future, which I welcome.,

The Minister mentioned research and development, which is important. I am glad that, under the auspices of the agreement, there will be joint initiatives between the European Community and EFTA, but the Minister gave few details, and there is little in the explanatory memorandum.

One crucial question which always arises when we debate European affairs is how level the playing field will be. I am still worried about the nature of the playing field, even as a result of the agreement. State aid varies widely throughout the Community. On the whole, state aid in EFTA countries is lower than in Community countries, but the playing field is far from level. One thing that has worried me—I hasten to say that I am not a subsidy junkie—is that we have reduced subsidies to industry unilaterally rather than within a framework agreed in the European Community. We must seek to correct that if our industry is not to suffer a disadvantage, as it has in recent years.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Is the hon. Lady saying that EFTA countries, which have lower state subsidies, have been less successful than EC countries?

Ms. Quin: No. I am saying that state aids can sometimes have a good or bad effect. Britain has much to learn from the supportive system in the European Community and EFTA countries—for example, the German regional länder network and the similar system in Austria, an EFTA country which is applying for European Community membership.

I should like the Government to consider export credits, for which a level playing field has not been created in recent years. The Government have increased export credit premiums to industry, whereas industry in other countries, including in EFTA countries, has not been disadvantaged in the same way.

Do the Government feel that the institutional arrangements being set up to govern the agreement can work effectively? It seems that the institutional set-up of the European Community of 12 is already becoming unwieldy. What will be the consequences for administration, languages and so on when the Community consists of 19 or more countries?

Do the Government have any views on the simplification and streamlining of European institutions, or on something that Labour Members have traditionally been worried about—the democratic deficit and the difficulty that national and European parliamentary institutions experience in influencing what is going on in the secret conclaves of the Council of Ministers and the council of EFTA Ministers?

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Lady assist us from her considerable expertise on the procedures of the European Parliament? She said that the Parliament wished to refer the agreement back to the European Court of Justice. I understand that it voted to do so last week, but that the Commission is saying that such further reference is not necessary. Can the Parliament reverse that vote, can it fudge it, or is it landed with it?

Ms. Quin: The European Parliament has given its view, as expressed in the vote, and it is for the Commission to respond. Other hon. Members may have more information, but my understanding is that the Commission could disregard the Parliament's views. However, in practice it is unlikely to do so. Therefore, I think that we are in for a period of further protracted negotiations on the subject. As the Minister has been party to the negotiations, perhaps he will comment on that when he replies to the debate.

Sir Russell Johnston: Picking up what the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) said, is not the European Parliament supposed to ratify this treaty? Is that not one of the consequences of Maastricht?

Ms. Quin: Indeed. If the Commission has not responded to the European Parliament, the Parliament may refuse to ratify the agreement. Although theoretically the Commissison is able to disregard what the Parliament says, in practice it is rather unlikely to do so.

The agreement is good, and the Opposition support it. It certainly makes sense for it to come into force at the beginning of 1993. The Government's overall approach to European policy has been to marginalise us in important areas, especially the economic and social areas. For that reason, the agreement will have much greater benefit to this country if a Labour Government bring it forward at the beginning of next year.

5.26 pm

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): The Select Committee on Trade and Industry welcomes this opportunity for a debate on the Floor of the House. We recommended such a debate when we studied trade with EFTA nations in 1990, and I thank my hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for having the good sense to allow hon. Members the chance to debate the agreement before a decision is taken on the form of the alliance with the European economic zone.

The agreement is a remarkably sound proposal and represents a remarkable achievement by all parties to the negotiations. In our 1990 review, we visited each of the EFTA nations with the exception of Liechtenstein. They were all eager to take part in an arrangement with the European Community, but none of us expected that it would be possible to hold a debate such as this only 18 months after they began to turn to the opportunities of the European Community in such a cross-party fashion.

Business men and the majority of parliamentarians throughout the nations that we visited were unanimous in their wish to be part of the European Community in some form or another. The Conservatives in Norway were leading the drive in that country. Our mission to those countries was slightly more newsworthy than our visit to each of the east European countries. Within six months, each of those countries had had a revolution. It has been suggested that we should adopt the title of the remarkable congressional committee in the United States, of Select Committee on Assassinations.

I am concerned that there should be no hold-up in the negotiations brought about by members of the European Parliament dancing around on the head of a pin as they usually do. I was concerned to read in the *Financial Times* and *The Times* last Saturday—I quote from the former—

"The European Parliament has further muddied the water by calling this week for any new EEA draft treaty to be resubmitted to the court"—

the European Court—

"for its opinion."

I know that it has to find a way to justify its existence, but I trust that it will not stand in the way of this remarkable opportunity to bring about the creation of a market of 40 per cent. of all world trade.

I deal now with a problem which faces us in the European Free Trade Association as it has faced us in far too many parts of the world. We have problems with a

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consistently poor balance of payments record, and I regard the opportunity of these barriers coming down and of getting free access into EFTA, which has a consistently larger gross domestic product per head, as unique, especially for quality exporters from the United Kingdom market. The GDP per capita in the free trade areas is between 15 per cent. and 50 per cent. greater per head of the population, and our attention was drawn to the opportunity for quality goods exports into the markets of Sweden, Switzerland and Austria.

With regard to the recommendations made in the Select Committee's report, I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend talk about the harmonisation of technical regulations and the mutual recognition of technical standards in the EEA. However, may I be assured that we shall not require those countries to lower their standards but that we shall try to rise to some of their standards—especially in terms of environmental protection—and especially of those set in Austria and Finland? I commend them to my right hon. Friend as worthy of further study. There is always a need to try to raise the quality of life which could be a major contribution to the negotiations.

The hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) wondered whether there would be level playing fields. We always call for level playing fields, but I have never found them anywhere in the world. We should not count on them at any time. We must make do with the best opportunities we have to get into a game, whatever the quality of the pitch.

On the free movement of services and financial services in particular, will my right hon. Friend give some guidance on where the negotiations have got so far in terms of foreign ownership of companies, including banks? At the moment, there are severe restrictions within EFTA countries on ownership by foreign companies. May I also ask him about preferential public procurement? As he remarked, there are many state organisations in those countries and we want to be assured that there will be right of access, especially in those concerned with transportation and energy.

On transportation, what progress will be made in the negotiations—which we hope will soon be successfully resolved—to give the European Community access to a single and liberalised market for scheduled air transport services? As my right hon. Friend knows, Scandinavian air transport costs are about the highest in the world, and they are a great deterrent to exporters to go about their business there. Within the agreement that already exists between Swissair, KLM and the Scandinavian Airlines System, I hope that air transport liberalisation can be achieved more quickly than has been the case in relations across the European Community.

Fishing has already been mentioned. I must declare an interest in respect of Hastings and Rye. I regret that our boats will not be able to get as far as Icelandic waters even on a calm day, but we never give up trying. When the Select Committee visited Iceland and Norway, we were conscious of the point that has already been made about the need for those countries to be assured of not only the protection but the conservation of their fish stocks. I must speak up strongly for the people of Iceland, for whom they are the sole major resource. It is ridiculous to think of the likelihood of the Spaniards ravishing their fishing grounds.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point, and I wholly endorse what he said about the conservation of fish stocks. Is he aware—he will undoubtedly have seen this when he was there—that the Icelandic Government have instituted by far the most rigorous and impressive programme of conservation of fish stocks of any country which has those interests at heart? Will he draw the attention not only of my right hon. Friend the Minister but of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to that, because our fisheries—as my hon. Friend knows—are coming under the same pressure, especially on the east coast?

Mr. Warren: I am very glad that I gave way to my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), because he makes a very sound point. The conservation measures that we saw in Iceland were of a world calibre of leadership. The question that occurs to me is, what is the advantage to the Spaniards in terms of the European market of scouring the fish stocks of, for example, Iceland, when they will merely sell on into the same market in which the Icelanders are trying to sell? I hope that we shall stand up vigorously for the Icelanders having forgotten—I hope—the cod wars of the past, and that we shall regard them as allies in wanting to share the market.

I know that a number of hon. Members want to contribute to the debate, so I shall conclude. I am conscious of the United Kingdom's identity of political interests with EFTA, especially with those of the northern tier of countries with which we share many common values. One advantage to the United Kingdom of such an extension would be that we would no longer be on the perimeter of the European Community—our centre of gravity would be more towards the centre of the combined interests of EFTA and the European Community.

As we move towards agreement, another remarkable step forward will be that neutrality and the balance with those who want to form military alliances are no longer a division or a problem. Ireland has been the only neutral within the European Community, but we shall, within the agreement which is being negotiated, bring in the interests in neutrality of Austria, Sweden and Finland and also of Iceland. We have here not only a major trade opportunity but a major political opportunity of important dimensions to this country.

As this agreement is being forged, may I ask my right hon. Friends and his colleagues in government—as they will be after the general election—to raise their eyes to new horizons and to consider the opportunities of incorporating the nations of eastern Europe as rapidly as possible into an economic zone, not merely the association agreements now being made? As chairman of the British-Russian parliamentary group, may I ask that the Commonwealth of Independent States is not forgotten, because we must offer it the possibility of being able to join the prosperity of western Europe as quickly as possible.

I am delighted to have had this opportunity to lend my support to the agreement which is commended to the House by my right hon. Friend.

5.38 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Like the other hon. Members who have spoken, I welcome the draft agreement and hope that it will be accepted.

I recollect the Minister saying that the countries of the European Free Trade Association would not have to bear the burden—perhaps those were not the words that he used—of the common agricultural policy. The thought crossed my mind that it was a very good agreement for EFTA and that perhaps we could consider applying for membership of EFTA so that we could have the benefit of not having to contribute to the CAP, but no doubt that is not possible.

I will raise two matters which are not connected. The first is the cohesion fund. The Minister did not deal with the matter thoroughly and was extremely brief, although it is important. The Minister said that the EFTA countries will contribute 500 million ecu in grants over five years to what is described in the jargon of the Community as a "cohesion fund". Perhaps that contribution is the danegeld that they have to pay for not being part of the common agricultural policy. The Minister then told us that Northern Ireland is the only region in the United Kingdom that will be able to benefit from the cohesion fund. The Republic of Ireland will also benefit, and we have no objection to either Northern Ireland or the Republic benefiting.

I make no apology for mentioning Wales, because it is the poorest region in Britain. On European Community figures for last year, and taking the average as 100, gross domestic product per head for Wales is 85. Scotland is exactly 100. The north-west, the north-east, Yorkshire and Humberside are slightly higher. The south-west, the east midlands and the west midlands are all higher. Wales has the lowest GDP per head in the whole of Britain.

Wales is located in the west of Britain. The hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren) said that the agreement shifted the centre of gravity of the Community. As a result of what has happened in eastern Europe over the past few years, the centre of gravity has moved eastwards and, as a result of this agreement, it is now moving slightly northwards. The western areas of Britain will suffer. The whole of Ireland will be compensated to some extent, whereas Wales and the other western parts of Britain are in danger of falling between two stools.

The same is true of the Maastricht agreement, which set up a cohesion fund and an infrastructure fund. Both are based on the same definition of the poorer regions of Britain.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Is it not a basic feature of the Maastricht agreement that Northern Ireland is excluded because it is part of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Davies: I hope that the Minister will answer that question. It has never been clear to me whether the rules that apply to the cohesion fund under the European economic area agreement also apply to the cohesion fund under the Maastricht agreement. I understood that the Maastricht agreement dealt merely with national GDP per head. As the United Kingdom's GDP per head is higher than 100, Northern Ireland and Wales are excluded. This cohesion fund may be slightly different. I am sorry that the Minister hardly dealt with that point. I hope that he will tell us why Northern Ireland was included—there is no objection to its inclusion—whereas Wales, for example, was not included. Is Northern Ireland included in the Maastricht cohesion fund? If it is, why is not Wales included? Perhaps Wales is included. We must deal with that matter because it is extremely important.

It may take some time to attain economic and monetary union; but, as we move towards it, the centralisation of currency and the fact that we shall not be able to control our own currency or, to a considerable extent, our public expenditure will mean that the areas on the periphery—which, if Ireland is to be an exception, will be mainly those in the west of Britain, especially Wales, the north-west of England and parts of the west of Scotland—will not get the attention or benefit that they deserve. I hope that the Minister will give us a more adequate and a clearer explanation of the cohesion funds when he winds up the debate.

The second matter may sound esoteric and may not seem to be connected with the first point. I refer to the legal opinion of the European Court on the original draft agreement. My hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin)—I do not criticise her for this—spoke about legal niceties. That is one way in which to describe the matter, but I believe that the court's opinion goes far further than legal niceties. The court set out clearly its view about what the European Economic Community, or European union as it will be called, is all about. I understand that the European Parliament may wish to send back to the court even the cobbled-up compromise reached as a result of the court's condemnation of the original agreement. If that happens, we may again come into conflict not with the court, but with the way in which the court interprets the basic purposes of the European Economic Community or European union.

Paragraph 17 of the court's opinion says that it follows, among other things, from certain articles of the treaty that "that treaty"—that is, the treaty of Rome—

"aims to achieve economic integration leading to the establishment of an internal market and economic and monetary union."

The opinion refers to the original treaty of Rome to which we adhere as a result of a vote in the House on the royal prerogative in 1972. Let us be under no illusion. Despite all the things that we were told in 1972, adherence to the treaty meant adherence to economic and monetary union, and not merely to a free trade area.

The opinion continues:

"Article 1 of the Single European Act makes it clear moreover that the objective of all the Community treaties is to contribute together to making concrete progress towards European unity."

The Single European Act was about European unity.

When one listened to some members of the Cabinet who now criticise the Act, it seemed as if the Act was just about the free movement of goods. Of course it was not. As the court has said and as the preamble to the Act says, the Act is about concrete progress towards "European unity".

The court also said:

"It follows from the foregoing that the provisions of the EEC Treaty on free movement"—

the free movement of goods—

"and competition, far from being an end in themselves, are only means for attaining those objectives."

That was the fundamental dilemma in respect of the EFTA-EC agreement. The court says that the articles on the free movement of goods and competition rules, and all the directives linked to them, must be interpreted on the basis that they lead to European unity.

I do not know what European unity is. Nobody has defined it and nobody seems to have a clue what it is. Is it

[Mr. Davies]

a federal or a confederal union? It is a serious matter that the court interprets directives on the basis of a goal called "European unity" which it is not prepared to define.

I digress a little by mentioning briefly the problem of Sunday trading. The Torfaen borough council case, which went to the European Court, was decided on the basis that any restriction on Sunday trading was a limitation on article 30 on the free movement of goods. I suppose that it is. If anyone closes a shop anywhere in the EC, it is a restriction on the free movement of goods. A sensible court which did not have a great goal of European union which it wanted to achieve would have said, "It is de minimis. Let us not bother about it." The European Court could not do that. In the court's view, a restriction under article 30 meant that the goal of European unity would somehow be affected. There was a nonsense decision.

There is a fundamental question here about the nature of the Community. It is no good our going to Maastricht, or the Foreign Secretary managing to have the word "federal" removed from that treaty, if the fundamental proposition advanced by the court is that we are talking in the EC about progress towards European unity. I do not know what European unity means, and it is a strange court of law that says that everything must be interpreted in the light of European unity and does not have a clue what that means.

That brings me to my final point, which is that we appoint judges to the court. I have never believed that there is too much wrong with the way in which our system of justice operates, with the Lord Chancellor appointing judges to the courts of England and Wales. There may be a case for a small committee of senior judges to advise him, and I have an open mind on that. The European Court is an entirely different matter. It is a political court whose goal is European unity and which interprets directives and treaty agreements in accordance with that political goal.

One of these days, we will have to look at the views of those appointed. Apparently, one judge was appointed recently and another is about to be appointed. There is also the Advocate-General. In the United States, which has a similar constitution, judges are asked their views on matters such as federalism and jurisdiction of the court. Apparently, we do not ask the judges whom we appoint to the European Court their views on European unity. Do they have a clue what it means? Have they ever thought about it? Those are matters which, some say, we should discuss.

The problem with EFTA and the EC highlights that difficulty. It was the EC's legal people who eventually said that the matter had to go to the European Court because they could see that there was a fundamental conflict in the development of the Community. The Community cannot develop as a free trade area, including all those other countries—which the Government seem to want and about which we are all in agreement—if we have the court saying that everything must be geared towards European unity, whatever that may mean.

We shall have to wait to see what happens with the cobbled-up agreement. Perhaps it will be all right. I do not know; I suspect that it may not be all right. I repeat that this is not a legal nicety but a fundamental problem, to which the House will have to return before too long, concerning the development and eventual nature of the Community to which we belong.

5.52 pm

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I find myself in a slightly strange position. I am usually somewhat critical of the Commission and support the concept of redressing the democratic deficit. On this occasion, however, I support the position that the Commission has taken and am rather critical of that which the European Parliament has adopted.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Frans Andriessen, who has persisted with this matter despite having been obstructed by the European Parliament and the European Court. We need to take a broad view of these matters. We are talking about a dramatic development, in that the European economic area will comprise 19 European countries. Most important, it will take within itself a group of countries—primarily the Nordic countries—that have an enormous contribution to make to the concept and development of European democracy. The Nordic countries have one of the longest established democratic traditions in Europe. They have much to teach Europe about parliamentary democracy. We have made our own important contribution, but the more countries with such traditions we have in Europe, the better, and a step that will almost inevitably lead to the enlargement of the Community is extremely welcome.

It is rather sad that juridical minutiae seem to be preventing that from happening. It is not particularly edifying to see lawyers and the European Parliament arguing over such minute matters. The Commission itself believes that, under article 238, we could proceed as it had originally proposed. As I understand it, the only issue regarding the competence of the court was that the court felt that its competence would not extend throughout EFTA and that a compromise arrangement would therefore need to be made.

I hope that the arrangement that we have now reached will mean that the matter can now proceed quickly and that the St. Valentine's day decision will lead to a swift consummation of the love affair between the 19 nations of the European economic area. The draft treaty ought to be endorsed as quickly as possible. If 19 European Governments can agree that they wish to follow a particular course of action, it seems to me thoroughly undesirable that the institutions of the EC should seek to prevent them from doing so on purely technical grounds. It will be a sad reflection on the European Parliament if, the first time that it exercises its enlarged powers under the Maastricht treaty, it uses them so as to obstruct the agreement that has been worked out.

The agreement is enormously important to the whole European Community. In particular, in relation to Maastricht, the cohesion fund that has been established will mean that there will be considerable additional resources to help with the convergence of the economies of the European Community. The importance of that should not be underestimated. Inevitably, considerable problems will arise in achieving the degree of convergence envisaged under the Maastricht treaty, and, unless additional funding is available, that convergence could be long delayed.

The creation of the EEA, with the additional funds that the wealthier countries from the northern fringe and Switzerland and Austria will bring, will help that process considerably. In that regard, can the Minister tell us the extent to which the cohesion fund as proposed will meet the likely level of contribution that would be required from the EFTA countries had they been applying now for full membership of the Community?

This marvellous opportunity should be grasped by the whole Community. If it is necessary to interpret treaties in more flexible ways, I hope that we shall do so, and I hope that the European Parliament, in particular, will not stand in our way.

5.57 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): As always, I found the speech of the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) most interesting. I do not know that I agree with him that the referral of the treaty on the EEA to the European Court was legally insignificant and a technicality—I shall return to that in a minute—but I strongly support the paean of praise that he uttered for Nordic democracy. As he will know, Nordic democracy is non-confrontational, consensual and founded on proportional representation. I hope that we shall be infected with it very soon.

Mr. Ian Taylor: They have Conservative Governments in Nordic countries.

Sir Russell Johnston: Proportional representation does not preclude Conservative Governments.

The Liberal Democrats support the establishment of the European economic area, which, as several hon. Members have said, is clearly the prelude to the extension of the European Community. It also sounds the death knell of the alternative concept of a loose economic grouping, put forward by those who argued first against the establishment of the EC and then against moves to make it more effective by more effective integration.

EFTA was the only alternative to the European Community. That was why the British Government of the day, in their short-sighted fashion, were unwilling to work with the then six and took a leading role in establishing EFTA as the alternative. We abandoned that, along with Denmark and Ireland, in 1973, and it is now set to be wound up altogether. Therefore, we should recall the fact that those who took that "have our cake and eat it" attitude were wrong. Some, sadly, like the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), are still wrong.

I will not prolong this short debate, as many hon. Members wish to speak. Three hours is an absurdly short time to examine such a width of issues with any thoroughness. The Minister himself called it the most ambitious agreement so far signed by the Community. That highlights the great difficulty facing the House in dealing collectively in the Chamber with European Community issues.

The fourth report of the Trade and Industry Committee is full and detailed, and the Committee and its Chairman, the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren), from whom we have already heard, deserve much credit. However, the report is a year and a half old, and it has not been debated. In any event, the views of a Committee do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the House as a whole. The Government's reaction appeared in October 1990 and, to my knowledge, it has not been debated either.

I do not believe that such a procedure can be considered an adequate representation of Parliament's views on European Community negotiations or legislation. We should have full and suitably timed debates.

Mr. Warren: I am grateful to the hon. Member for referring to our report. However, I assure him that the report was unanimous, and included the full support of a member of the Liberal Democrats.

Sir Russell Johnston: I was not suggesting that it was not unanimous. As the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye said, the Committee was not divided, but that does not mean to say that that is always the case in Select Committees. If the principle is that it is adequate parliamentary consultation for a Committee to deal with an issue, I do not agree with that principle.

Mr. Warren *indicated assent.*

Sir Russell Johnston: Obviously the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye agrees with me about that. We need suitably timed debates that take place well in advance if we are to exert influence on the Minister before negotiations or Council of Ministers meetings.

There is another alternative: that the House should no longer seek to duplicate what is done in the European Parliament, but should leave detailed representations to that body and confine itself to debates on general issues —while of course always retaining the right which any Member or group of Members have of raising specific matters with Ministers. The present position is neither one thing nor the other. There is a pretence of exercising influence without the reality.

However, across the piece, the Community has conducted a good negotiation, and the Committee has produced a good report. I suspect that the replies to this debate will be truncated because of the number of hon. Members who wish to participate. If the Minister cannot answer all my points, I would appreciate it if he would drop me a wee note.

As several hon. Members have said, the arrangements on fish represent an advance in terms of access on what exists under the common fisheries policy at present. However, as the existing CFP agreement relates to estimates of available fish, have those been changed? The previous agreement was based on what could be fished properly and safely on conservation grounds, but is that now to be extended? On what basis is it being carried out?

The hon. Members for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) and for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) referred to policing. If the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow is right—I think he is—there will be two levels of policing in fishing areas. There will be tighter control in Norwegian waters and less tight control elsewhere. That is very unsatisfactory, and the House and the Government, through the Council of Ministers, should do more about Community policing in Community waters.

The Minister referred to exclusion of fish species, and specifically mentioned salmon. Was he referring to wild salmon running in the sea, or did his comments include farmed salmon? The Minister will be aware that there has been a great deal of concern among fish farmers who produce salmon. That is an important industry in my

[Sir Russell Johnston]

constituency, especially in Lochaber, where Marine Harvest has just been put up for sale by Unilever. There is much employment in the industry in respect of processing in Fort William and in the farms on the west coast, where there is little alternative employment. The concern related to the blatant dumping of farmed salmon by Norway. There was much negotiation and to-ing and fro-ing about that, and I wonder whether that was affected by the agreement.

Recommendation 4 of the Trade and Industry Committee indicated that the creation of the EEA would provide an opportunity for further progress on discrimination against United Kingdom alcohol, which of course includes Scots whisky and related Scots whisky-based liqueurs. As the Government have said that they hoped that there would be opportunities for further progress, I should like to know what further progress has been achieved.

With regard to recommendation 7, I would like to know the up-to-date position on competitive public procurement. As hon. Members will be aware, our construction industry is currently under-used and could well have competitive opportunities opened up to it.

Recommendation 9 relates to the promotion of direct flights from United Kingdom regional airports, and what the DTI called "innovative fares". That will be most welcome if it happens. However, considering the current war of words between British Airways and Virgin Airways, and recalling the fate of Mr. Laker, who certainly went in for innovative fares, I confess to being somewhat sceptical about that. Perhaps the fact that Lord King went into a huff and stopped paying money to the Conservative party might give the Government a freer hand—who knows?

Finally, I do not believe that it is that helpful for the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye to make abusive remarks about the European Parliament, satisfying though that might be. It is always very satisfying to make abusive remarks, but the European Parliament was simply defending the position of the court, which EFTA sought to circumvent. It is not unreasonable that the Parliament should wish to be assured that the new arrangements will make the position of the courts secure.

In response to the right hon. Member for Llanelli, the court is in reality a federal court. In reaching the new agreement, I hope that there has been contact between the institutions—the Commission and the Council—and the court so that there will be no delay. I agree entirely with the hon. Member for Gateshead, East, that that would be most undesirable. I hope that the European Parliament will not hesitate about ratification.

Mr. Butterfill: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, and I am sure that that is the technical position that the European Parliament has taken. However, in practice, surely it did not like the idea of a separate court with enhanced jurisdiction over a wider area. Surely it wanted to reinforce the position of the total competence over all Community matters of the European Court of Justice. That was a narrow-minded outlook, in view of the magnitude of the events that it was being asked to consider.

Sir Russell Johnston: I agree entirely with the definition that the hon. Member has spelt out. However, I do not agree that that was a small-minded approach. I do not see the point of having two separate courts, given the short life of the agreement between today and the eventual adhesion of most of the members involved in it, with the possible exception of Iceland and, later, Norway.

In conclusion I entirely agree that this is a great step forward for all Europe. It was slow in coming, but it is all the more welcome for that.

6.9 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): There was a time when we were told that none of the EFTA countries would survive the Common Market. In fact, when this country had the opportunity of having a referendum, we were told that it would be the demise of those countries. One has only to look at the progress that EFTA has made, its balance sheet, and the eagerness of the EC now to make peace with it to realise that the prophets who prophesied doom were false prophets and that their prophecy was entirely wrong. We need to face up to that fact. It would be interesting to read the speeches of right hon. and hon. Members who were prepared at that time to read an obituary notice to EFTA and all its deeds. But EFTA still exists.

The widening of the European Community is to the good. I should rather see the EC widened than deepened, and I should like to see the possibility of it being a real European Community in which the whole of Europe is included. I am not arguing for federalism—everybody knows my views—but I am arguing for a unity amidst the diversity, and I am also urging for that interdependence which does not destroy independence. That is the way in which Europe should develop.

The new cohesion fund has the same objective as the Maastricht cohesion fund—to help people in the less-favoured areas of the Community who need to be cushioned because of progress made toward more prosperity in the more prosperous parts of the European Community. One would have thought that the same ground rules would adhere to this cohesion fund and the Maastricht cohesion fund, but they do not. This cohesion fund seems to take into consideration objective 1 areas of the EC. The Maastricht fund does not do that. For example, Wales, which is an objective 2 area, is completely left out. I should have thought that all parts of the European Community which are to be hit, and hit hard economically by what is going on in Europe, should be included in the cohesion fund.

I am glad that Northern Ireland, the only United Kingdom objective 1 area in the Community, is included. However, I do not think that other parts of the United Kingdom which are equally entitled to help should have been excluded. However, in the Maastricht deal, Northern Ireland alone is an objective 1 area and it is excluded. Three Northern Ireland Members of the European Parliament met the Prime Minister and drew his attention to that subject. He has argued that the criterion is different, that we are dealing with the United Kingdom as a whole and that, therefore, the objective 1 argument does not come into it.

I do not know how one can have two agreements, one arguing on one set of principles and the other arguing on another set. If the objective of the European Community is to be achieved, objective 1 and 2 areas in the United Kingdom should be included. I trust that, even now, the

Government will have second thoughts on this matter and I hope that the Minister will spell out exactly what the cohesion fund under this agreement will be in comparison with the cohesion fund under the Maastricht agreement.

The other matter which I should like the Minister to develop relates to fish. We are not getting the full story on fish. The measure deals with cod. I am not suggesting that the Minister is acting the cod, but someone is certainly not telling us the full facts. How much will United Kingdom fishermen benefit? May they have a firm figure?

I congratulate the Minister on the good document—one can read it. One cannot read the other documents that we are to discuss later. Perhaps it is another conspiracy of the Government to keep us from reading them. How can one read such documents? One cannot make them out. Even when I went back and said, "Give me another copy," the second one was almost as bad as the first. If I came from Aberdeen instead of Ballymena, I would go back even for a third copy that I could read.

The document tells us that the EC will have greater access to fishing grounds. It states:

"The EC share of the total allowable catch for North Norway cod will increase from 2.14 per cent. to 2·9 per cent."

It is said that we will do very well out of that because of the

"two-thirds of the total."

Will the Minister tell us what the total is and what the term "two-thirds of the total" really means? The document goes on to refer to France and Germany and states:

"Norway will also grant the EC separate fixed quantities of cod to be allocated to Spain, Portugal and possibly Ireland".

Those countries never fish in those fishing grounds. We are told that that does not alter the treaty, but the document is making a change in what was tightly negotiated by all those countries which had an interest in fishing and which were attempting to safeguard their fishing grounds. We now have a new fishing arrangement that includes Spain, Portugal and possibly Ireland.

Ireland is mentioned in the paper as the Republic of Ireland. How does the Republic of Ireland come into it? The paper says "possibly Ireland". Perhaps Ireland is excluded. Knowing the Republic of Ireland, I know that, if there is anything going for nothing, it will be in on it, all right. I should have thought that it would be in on this deal.

We need to know what will happen to those fishing grounds. Why does this agreement interfere with already agreed principles on fishing? Is it because Spain and Portugal opposed the treaty and that they had to be bought off? Is this the way that they were bought off? The Minister should tell us the truth. Is there a real benefit to our fishermen? If there is, I welcome it, because we in the United Kingdom have had a raw deal on fishing.

One of the things that we need to tell Europe over and again is that there would be no large fishing grounds but for the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom has given liberally to Europe. We are often told that the British are little Englanders, but that is certainly not the case in respect of fishing, because we have given liberally to establish a common fishing policy. I ask the Minister to tell us exactly how much we are to benefit. The document states:

"The Agreement can be expected to afford financial benefit to the UK by virtue of the increased opportunities for UK business as described above. Northern Ireland will be a beneficiary of the EFTA cohesion fund."

Of course I welcome that, but other parts of the United Kingdom which suffer unemployment and an economic plight such as that of Northern Ireland should also be included in that cohesion fund.

6.19 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) said that years ago the EFTA countries were reluctant to associate with the European Community. I remind him that Norway voted against membership of the European Economic Community in the referendum because of the understandable fears of many Norwegians, particularly in fishing communities in the north of Norway, about the common fisheries policy. There is no doubt that attitudes have changed but there was a deep fear about the CFP and open access to northern Norwegian waters.

I see that the Minister is away for the moment. I welcome the agreement, but some elements of it give rise to some concern. In my brief speech I wish to ask some questions which could perhaps be relayed to the Minister.

My first question is about the free movement of persons. Paragraph 11 of the explanatory memorandum published by the Department of Trade and Industry says:

"The Agreement prohibits discrimination between EC and EFTA nationals in respect of employment".

The Minister spoke about self-employment and the creation of businesses. But the same paragraph also says: "this embraces the right to accept offers of employment actually made, to stay in an EC or EFTA country for that purpose and to remain there afterwards."

I ask the question that I asked earlier: what is the position of immigrant workers long domiciled in European Community countries? I refer, for example, to the North African immigrant workers in France or those known as gastarbeiter in Germany? It seems that the EC countries have reached some sort of tacit agreement about such European Community residents. By that, I mean that such people will be confined to the countries in which they reside now.

We are talking about several millions of people. Tacitly or otherwise, the European Community has affixed to those people second class-status as citizens. I do not believe that they will be allowed to move around the 12 EC countries, let alone the EFTA countries. I would like an answer to that critical point. We talked about the problems of immigration into the European Community, but we also have a serious problem of migration of people such as I have described, many of whom have lived for years and years in, say, France or Germany. They seem to have second-class status as citizens.

I promised to be brief, but I wish to ask some questions about fishing. I listened intently to the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston), who is knowledgeable on the subject—as, of course, he needs to be—and to the hon. Member for Antrim, North. I agree with the Minister that the agreement will benefit some of our distant water trawlers with regard to north Norway cod.

I should perhaps declare an interest here. I am not a fisherman myself, but I have a brother who is the mate of a big freezer trawler. He and his comrades will undoubtedly benefit from the agreement because that trawler is one of the few which has the capability to fish in such dangerous waters. For reasons of safety, not all the trawlers that one sees in Ulster or the Republic of Ireland

[Dr. Norman A. Godman]

should go out to those dangerous grounds. The same holds true for Icelandic waters, which are equally dangerous for small vessels.

The Minister mentioned a fig[illegible]00 tonnes for the amount of cod coming to United Kingdom fishermen. The hon. Member for Antrim, North asked the Minister to give us a definitive figure. I should like the same information. The information that I have been given is that the figure for 1993 is 1,600 tonnes. Is the latter figure the increase in the amount that our fishermen will be able to catch or is it the total catch figure for 1993? I know that it is not the Minister's responsibility, but the responsibility of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries in Scotland. Does the figure refer to fish fillets or to whole fish as it comes over the side of the trawler? There is an important difference.

Paragraph 25 of the Minister's explanatory memorandum says:

"Iceland will provide a small additional quantity of fish, the allocation of which is still to be determined."

Did I hear the Minister aright? Did he mention red fish when he talked about the unknown Icelandic allocation? If that is the case, I wonder whether perhaps the United Kingdom and Germany could do a swap of allocations of red fish and Norway cod. Traditionally, United Kingdom trawlers do not fish for red fish. Would there be any chance of an agreement between Germany and the United Kingdom?

Despite the Minister's eminently reasonable comments about cohesion in relation to access for Spanish vessels to fishing grounds, I still believe that to give Spanish and Portuguese vessels access to grounds that they have never fished before bodes ill for the mid-term review of the common fisheries policy. There is no doubt that the Spanish, with their huge, over-large fleet, will seek access to United Kingdom grounds, from which at present they are rightly and properly excluded. That exclusion must remain. Now that the Spanish have won a significant concession on grounds that are not traditional to them, they will be heartened about their bargaining position in the mid-term review of the CFP. If the common agricultural policy is important, especially to Conservative Members, I can tell the House that the CFP is very important to our fishing communities in Scotland and, of course, elsewhere.

I am worried about the agreement which allows Spanish vessels to fish [illegible] new waters, because it will strengthen the position of the Spanish when they come to negotiate the mid-term review. We are almost upon it—it is literally months away. Now that they have the agreement to fish, perhaps in Icelandic waters and certainly in Norwegian waters, they will say that the derogation given to the United Kingdom protecting our inshore waters should be examined.

By the agreement, the United Kingdom is stirring up problems for our fishing industry in the mid-term review. I am aware that it is not the responsibility of the Minister, but it is the responsibility of Her Majesty's Government and he is the ministerial representative of the Front Bench now. We are heading into danger.

Mr. Butterfill: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is possible to take the reverse view? The very fact that the Norwegians have been prepared to grant access will relieve some of the pressure on us to grant access in the review. It is entirely helpful that the EFTA countries are prepared, through the cohesion fund and fisheries extensions, to take some of the burden of introducing a level of convergence between the economies of the Community. The principal Spanish argument is an economic one. Spain says that it needs economic assistance. Whether that comes through the extension of fishing areas or other economic assistance is unimportant: the important principle is that the wealthier northern countries are giving more assistance to the poorer southern countries.

Dr. Godman: I am sure that the fact that the European Fisheries Commissioner, Mr. Marin, is Spanish has no bearing on what has happened. I trust the man that far. The Spanish will not catch much fish off northern Norway, but they have achieved a breakthrough in the negotiations between the European Community and third countries in terms of access to the waters of those third countries. That breakthrough is important to the Spanish Government and their negotiators, as will be seen when we come to the mid-term review.

Everywhere, there are far too many fishermen chasing too few fish. We all know that, and we are arguing for a decommissioning scheme for our fleet, which is too big for the stocks upon which it exists. The Spanish must face up to the same problems. They must halve their distant water fleet instead of coming into our waters.

Policing of waters has already been mentioned. Scottish and English fishermen going into northern Norwegian waters to fish tell us that the policing is much tougher than anything that they encounter in the European Community. The Norwegian coastguard knows exactly where every foreign vessel is fishing. Boardings are frequent and the penalties for infringement of rules are savage. Licences are taken away and huge financial penalties are inflicted on miscreants. That has always been the case in Norwegian and Icelandic waters. The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber is right: we are talking about two systems of policing.

I hope that I do not sound too chauvinistic when I say that the Spanish are among the worst when it comes to breaking rules on the catching of fish, not just in our waters but in Irish waters. They have a shocking record, but they will come adrift in Norwegian waters if they try such games with the Norwegian coastguard.

The Minister spoke about red fish, and I should like to know the precise figures on northern Norway cod. Paragraph 33 of the explanatory memorandum refers to the creation of

"An EEA Joint Parliamentary Committee, composed of MEPs and EFTA parliamentarians".

Was any thought given to placing on that committee of Members of Parliament from the 12 national legislatures of the European Community? If the purpose of that committee is to promote mutual understanding through dialogue and debate, I should have thought that Members of Parliament from EFTA countries would benefit enormously from meeting fellow Members of Parliament as we are the ones in the parliamentary front line when matters of this kind are debated.

I hope that, as this relationship develops, Iceland and Norway will give up the barbarous activity of whaling. They do not need to catch whales—they are both affluent north Atlantic countries—and I hope that, as a humane

gesture, they will renounce whaling altogether. Such a decision would be welcomed throughout the other 17 countries.

I hope that the restrictions on the dumping of Norwegian farmed salmon will be maintained. I seek an assurance from the Minister on this because dumping of such salmon has caused serious problems to our communities, which are largely dependent on the still young industry of sea fish farming. Although I have some reservations about the agreement, I think that in general it is a fine thing.

6.24 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): There can be no doubt that this is an important day for the changing shape of Europe, with the creation of a gigantic single market with a gross national product of £4,000 billion. It is much the world's largest single free trade area, being bigger than Canada and the United States together, and even when those two countries are joined with Mexico. Clearly, this change should be unreservedly welcomed as an advance in free trade which will bring prosperity to all peoples, provided that the lawyers and the European Parliament allow that to happen.

I must confess some sympathy with the comments made by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) about the workings of the European Court of Justice and its tendency always to find in favour of the treaty and the union in its most narrow sense. No doubt we shall come to those matters when the House debates the ratification of the Maastricht accords, particularly in the light of the subsidiarity item, item 3b in the draft Maastricht treaty. Presumably the judicial figures in the European Court of Justice will have to take account of that in the future.

In the meantime, we have this fabulous area of free trade, which we must strongly welcome and support. I have three quick points to make about it. First, this is all very temporary. We are looking at an arrangement that, almost before it comes into being, will be out of date and irrelevant, for the simple reason that several of the countries involved in it want to move on, as rapidly as possible, to full membership of the European Community. Austria and Sweden already have their applications in and hope that they will be under discussion as from June this year. Finland is reaching the decision that it wants to join, on certain terms. Switzerland will have a referendum in September, and I think that it will want to join, as will Norway.

The whole idea that the European economic agreement, creating economic space, would provide a new arrangement that would satisfy the EFTA countries has backfired. Far from satisfying them, it has disturbed the relationship that they had with the Community before and has led to the strong view that they must have membership. That is what is coming and, inevitably, this will lead to a pattern that is entirely different from the one that we are discussing today.

Secondly, what we are looking at today is part of the enlargement process that is about to sweep forward and will include not merely the five EFTA countries but the eastern European troika whose association agreements the House will discuss later, and perhaps the three Baltic states. Malta and Cyprus are also on the list, with Turkey at the end of it. There are also the new states of Slovenia and Croatia, and heaven knows what other states will emerge out of the Balkan stew. All may want to become full members of the European Community.

The European economic agreement is just the first step in the gigantic drama of enlargement of the European union. We still speak of the European Community but, from the moment of ratification of the Maastricht document by all Parliaments, we shall have something which is quite different and which is moving in a different direction—the European union of the 1990s.

My third point relates to some remarks made by the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) who spoke clearly and comprehensibly from the Opposition Front Bench about the changing nature of the Community institution. She is right to say that this step, and even more the further steps that follow inevitably from it through enlargement, are already changing the structure, character and nature of the European Community arrangements and the traditional or classic Community of which we have been a member for some years and which began in 1957, before our membership, with the original Six, under the aegis of the treaty of Rome.

We are now seeing the beginning of a huge change in the institutional structure. The document that we are discussing proposes that the 19 members should operate in a system that will give the new "Eftans" some kind of observer status, and a part-time relationship with parts of the Community structure and parts of the new union structure. It is difficult to see how that will work. We need only consider the problems—a positive tower of Babel—that will result from translation and interpretation requirements.

All that, however, is just another element of change in a European union that is already changing before our very eyes. What emerged at Maastricht—we shall discuss that further—was not just a system involving the Community, the old federal bit of Europe, but a system involving the intergovernmental or confederal bit in balance or alongside it: the pillars of common foreign security policy, interior policy, justice policy and so on. The EFTA countries will be associated with those pillars in a mild way through the agreement, and will want to be fully associated with them when they seek full membership of the Community, as they will do over the next two or three years.

I welcome what has taken place, and congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the work that he has done in setting up such a gigantic free trade structure. We as a House of Commons, however, should realise that we are viewing what is merely a passing scene —a brief photo-shot of European development. Everything will change radically; soon, we shall be debating the development of a European union totally unlike the Community that we have known in the past and institutionally different from that Community. What we are debating this evening represents only one step in that direction.

6.41 pm

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): It is most unsatisfactory that we should have to take part in such a truncated debate on a very practical and important matter within the European Community. It is particularly unsatisfactory for those who must speak at the tail end of the debate.

[Mr. Derek Enright]

Speakers constrained by the time limit, as was the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), find it impossible to develop points that I consider important.

It is an extraordinary experience for me to congratulate the Government twice in one afternoon: first, on apologising to Commissioner Millan and putting right the whole RECHAR business; secondly—without reservation—on the EFTA achievement. A very good job has been done, which will benefit both the Community and the EFTA countries. I feel that the Commission's officials should be congratulated as well; we tend to forget that they have been working on this for a very long time.

Let me issue a warning. It seems to me, from what I have read and from talking to continental colleagues, that some member countries wish to postpone full membership. As has been mentioned, Austria and Sweden have already applied for full membership, and it is certain that Finland will do so in the next few weeks. We know, however, that some member countries wish to block that development. I hope that the Minister will assure us that the Government are eager for EFTA countries to gain full membership as and when they apply.

I found the statements by the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) quite extraordinary. I first heard him speak on Europe in 1979, when we were together in the European Parliament. It struck me then that the hon. Gentleman had an imperfect grasp of what the Community was about, and I am sorry to note that he has regressed further since coming to the House.

Is it not clear that the EFTA countries—far from being satisfied with their current status, and far from considering themselves self-sufficient—seek the Community's help on two grounds? First, they wish to improve their own prosperity; secondly, there is a certain idealism involved in their application for full membership. That certainly did not apply in the 1970s.

May I advance a small defence of the European Parliament, in relation to its dealings with the European Court of Justice? During the negotiating process, there was considerable dispute about what legal rights were contained in the treaty, and whether they could be put in place while still fulfilling the Community's rules. The Parliament, very properly, placed them before the Court of Justice, which—far from behaving in the way described by my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies)—responded very positively, as anyone can see who reads the whole judgment.

The Court gave certain advice about how the treaty could be changed so as to fulfil the obligations that exist as a result of the various treaties that make up the Community. All that the Parliament is doing now is announcing a "holding position": it is saying, "Let us consult the Court of Justice to make sure that everything is right." Both Conservative and Labour MEPs, and people from all the countries concerned, have strongly backed the negotiations. The odd rogue elephant on either side has bucked them, but, on the whole, they have fought very hard for those negotiations. To suggest that MEPs are being obstructive is nonsense, and a failure fully to understand the proper custodial duties they have.

Much has been said this evening about eastern and central Europe, and the possible acceptance of those countries into full membership. I urge caution: it seems to me that merging central and eastern Europe with the west has become very much the flavour of the month, but that no practical thought has been devoted to how the process should take place.

For instance, it is no good the Government saying to the Community—as they have said—"We must give all possible assistance to eastern Europe's move towards democracy and its attempts to reform its economies," and then saying, "But, Mr. Commissioner"—or "Mr. Delors", perhaps—"we will not let you spend any money on it." That, in effect, is what the Government did, and that is what is being attacked now. That is nonsense: either practical assistance is to be given to eastern Europe or it is not. The Government really should make up their mind.

With the advent of EFTA countries to the European Community, the social chapter will clearly become much more important, because it is an important part of their institutions. Where do the Government stand in that regard? How did they talk to those countries? What negotiating stance will the Government take when those countries are entering the Community, and—eventually—pushing for what the other 11 are already demanding?

While we are talking about cohesion, let me say that I have great sympathy for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and all parts of the Community that have problems. We should remember, however, that the northern regions of England have the same problems; but, because we are not put together—although we have a sense of cohesion—we do not benefit from the cohesion funds. We have only recently begun to benefit from RECHAR, and we hope that that money will arrive very soon.

I must leave the Minister time to reply, but there has been no chance in this short debate to discuss external affairs. The relationship between the ACP—African, Caribbean and Pacific—countries and the EFTA countries is important.

The European Community has fishing agreements with third countries, particularly in Africa, where it has agreements with Senegal, Guinea-Bissau and a number of others. Has consideration been given to those African countries? It has not been mentioned in any document that I have seen, but are any EFTA countries asking for entry into such agreements?

The Government, in a first, faltering step, have done a very good job, and I congratulate them on it.

6.50 pm

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): I, too, shall be brief. I add my voice to that of the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) as I, too, want to know what European unity means in the context of the treaty and, in common with my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) I want to know about the moving panorama. It has taken a long time to reach this stage, with more countries wishing to become part of the Community or to have some relationship with it. In the meantime, the world is changing around us.

If we are to join the European railway train, I have two questions for the Minister. First, where is the train going? If I get on a train at Euston, I would like it to go to Liverpool. Otherwise, I have made a mistake and I end up somewhere else. Generally, I do not get that wrong. If I get on a train for European unity, where do I and the United Kingdom think that it will go?

I travelled with the Select Committee on Trade and Industry to the EFTA countries, and they had some idea of where they wanted to go. Business men, bankers and financiers all wanted to join the Community, but there was little mention of idealism. They realised, however, that there was a huge market that would be beneficial to their importers and exporters. That is why they wished to join.

I refuse to be stampeded by people to whom the word "Europe" involves almost a political orgasm. That cannot be right. Europe is or will have to be something, but we do not yet know what. If we were in a station waiting room, it would be helpful if all the people waiting for the train decided where they wanted to go and if they wanted to go together. If they want to go to the same place, all well and good. If they do not, let them make some other arrangements.

I make no pretensions to be president of Mensa, but I can read the odd document. I become dubious about things if they cause 57 questions to be asked of the Minister—I gave up counting after that. Perhaps the Minister will give his own brand of reply. Let us not dwell in a fantasy land, because, as Humpty Dumpty said in "Through the Looking-Glass",

"When I use a word . . . it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

I am getting off that train for the moment.

Mr. Enright: To have an orgasm.

6.53 pm

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): I shall not follow up that invitation while I am in the Chamber.

I, too, welcome this historic agreement, which has been negotiated over 20 months with great skill, patience and no few difficulties. It represents a great achievement if one considers that 380 million people will be part of a European free trade economic area. I am interested in this issue because, between 1969 and 1970, I was chairman of the European Union of Christian Democratic and Conservative Students, which covered the then EC and EFTA countries. I particularly remember that many of the countries that are now involved in this agreement were very concerned about the European Community because of their neutrality.

Times have changed. The Swedish Government have almost officially dropped neutrality and Austria does not talk about neutrality or its treaty obligations, because of its relationship with the Soviet Union. The changes right across Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals, have led to a further dramatic impact, because countries such as Sweden, Finland and Austria feel that they no longer have to pay lip service to their position as neutral powers.

I was delighted that the agreement made its final leap forward under the Portuguese presidency of the EC. Portugal was the last member of EFTA to join the EC. It therefore understood the interests of its more recent partners. The agreement underlines the vitality of the European Community as a series of institutions. Let us not evade that fact. It is an agreement whereby EFTA countries have entered into a series of complex negotiations and accepted the "Acquis Communautaire" and the regulations in the areas in which the agreement has been formed, which were agreed by members of the Community—not them.

They have also accepted a remarkable series of commitments to be developed by the Community. They have done that not just because they want to have access to an enlarged free trade area—important though that is—but because they understand why they wish to be part of the political union which the European Community represents. As Carl Bildt, the Conservative Prime Minister of Sweden says:

"Now we are heading full speed to the EC."

EFTA members understand that it is important to be part of the most vibrant political bloc in the world today. What sort of Community will it be if EFTA members join, as I hope that they will be able to do quickly?

There are important questions that we shall have a chance to debate in the House—certainly the British Government will have a chance to consider them in more detail during our presidency of the Community, starting on 1 July. How will the enlarged Community cope with subsidiarity? How will institutions be streamlined? Up to 19 countries could be trying to make decisions at once.

For example, if all the countries made opening statements to the council of Ministers, it would take more than three hours before they could commence the meeting. That is implausible. There would be enormous complications for the European Parliament, given the number of extra nations and their delegates. There would be great difficulties if the Commission were expanded beyond its current base. Those matters must be tackled quickly. Obviously, they will be tackled in ways which mean that certain concessions must be made by nation states. We must think carefully about what we would like those concessions to be.

This country is at the forefront of those wanting the Community to be widened. As I have said before—I repeat it now, because it is essential to appreciate this point—widening is not necessarily a way of avoiding deepening, closer integration. Widening will involve deepening. We must ensure that we understand clearly what the process entails and that we appreciate the difficulties. In the course of pursuing a policy to widen the Community, we must be prepared to accept deepening integration.

There are 13 official languages, giving 156 combinations for translation. It is clear that the broadened Community could grind to a halt. As the House knows, I am a good European and I obviously expect the Community to make the most sensible decision and to adopt English as its sole language. However, Scottish accents will be encouraged.

Institutional change is inevitable. We should think carefully about what that should be. As soon as possible we should welcome into the great Community those members of EFTA that have signed the European economic area agreement. When they become part of the Community, the Community and free trade will be strengthened, there will be a decline in the protectionist attitudes present in certain parts of the Community and the European union will be made much stronger.

6.59 pm

Ms. Quin: I shall be brief, because I had an opportunity to raise a good many issues in my opening speech and I am sure that the Minister is waiting eagerly to answer in full the many questions that have been addressed to him.

The Minister said that the debate was timely. I somewhat disagree with that. Indeed, following the comments made by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston), I feel that we are being presented with an agreement that is virtually complete,

[Ms. Quin]

and that it would have been helpful to have a wider and perhaps longer discussion at an early stage in the proceedings. None the less, many useful points have been made during the debate and I hope that the Minister will give a full response.

Reference has been made to the legal considerations and the views of the European Court and the European Parliament. My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) took me to task slightly because he felt that I was downgrading some of the legal aspects of the case. I did not intend to do so. I realise their importance, but I also believe that the vital political and economic considerations that the agreement represents should not be overlooked. That was the danger to which I referred.

I am not surprised that many hon. Members spoke about their respective regions and the issues and industries in their parts of the United Kingdom; nor am I surprised that some hon. Members feel that their regions have been short-changed by the agreement and that it would have been a good idea to include the interests of some other regions in the agreement, not simply restricting it to the objective 1 areas in the European Community. In that respect, the Government are the victim of their own propaganda. They have made many dubious claims about economic miracles but they are not prepared to accept the real economic situation of our regions and the country as a whole.

I hope that the Minister will respond to the questions raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) about the gastarbeiter and immigrant workers in the European Community, and the real danger that they may be consigned to second-class status.

I hope also that the Minister will respond to the important question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright), who urged that the EEA agreement should not be used by certain members of the European Community as an excuse to block progress on applications for full membership submitted by certain EFTA countries.

I believe that the United Kingdom can derive considerable benefit from the agreement, but I still have grave doubts about the Government's priorities in Europe and their overall strategies. It is simply not credible for the Prime Minister to say that he wants us to be at the heart of Europe yet, through the double opt-out at Maastricht, do his best to consign us to the periphery.

The hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) said a good deal about trains. In many aspects of European policy, we are in danger of missing the train altogether unless we act to ensure that we do not lose the opportunities available to us. We need to make a success of our membership, both of the Community and of the European economic area, and ensure that our industries and regions can benefit to the full, not just in the Europe of the Twelve but in the wider Europe that we all want to see created.

7.5 pm

Mr. Sainsbury: The most important part of this short debate has been the general welcome that has been given to the agreement on the European economic area by both sides of the House. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) said, it should be unreservedly welcomed. However, reservations, or should I say questions, about the agreement rained down upon me. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter), I too lost count of the number of questions that I was being asked. I must take advantage of the suggestion put by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) that I should send "a wee note", as he so charmingly put it, to those hon. Members whose questions I could not answer in the short time available to me. I shall scour the pages of *Hansard* to ensure that everyone who has asked a question receives such a wee note.

I agree, at least on one issue, with the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin). It is sensible that the agreement comes into force on 1 January 1993 at the same time as the completion of the single market.

The resolution of the European Parliament was referred to by a number of hon. Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren) and for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill). The recent amendments made to the agreement take account of the court's opinion last December. I am aware that the European Parliament has made a resolution that a further opinion should be sought. However, as the amendments take account of the court's earlier opinion, it seems to me that no further opinion is necessary and we should be able to go ahead with ratifying the agreement.

Another issue that attracted attention from a number of quarters, including the hon. Members for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), was fish. That is a particularly difficult and complex issue. As the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow recognised, it is primarily a responsibility for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

I was asked precisely how much extra fish would be available to British fishermen. I am not capable of answering that question, because it depends on the total allowable catch. The good news part of the agreement for United Kingdom fishermen is that the European Community's share will be increased from 2·14 per cent. of the total allowable catch to 2·9 per cent. It is impossible to quantify that precisely, because it is a percentage of the total allowable catch.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye asked about another important matter—public procurement. I assure him and the House that EFTA has agreed to implement fully the directives on public procurement. That is one of the major advantages to be derived from the agreement.

The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) and various other hon. Members asked about cohesion. The House will appreciate that reaching an agreement on that part was difficult. Some objective 1 areas in France, Germany and Italy will not be beneficiaries of the cohesion aspects of the agreement. It will be appreciated that, if they are excluded, there will be no question of bringing in objective 2 areas. Indeed, it was only through the Government's strenuous efforts that we had Northern Ireland included as a beneficiary.

I emphasise that the agreement will facilitate EC membership for any EFTA countries that want to join. Through the agreement, they will already have adopted most single market provisions, and negotiations have

covered much of the ground of an accession negotiation. That is a positive aspect of any EFTA country that wants to join.

The issue of the so-called gastarbeiter was raised by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow. The new freedoms of movement for persons and of establishment for individuals and the self-employed apply to nationals of the European Community. Therefore, there is no discrimination. The new freedoms are specifically intended for nationals.

Dr. Godman: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Sainsbury: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way. I shall send him one of the wee notes which I mentioned earlier. Time is limited.

The hon. Member for Gateshead, East spoke about the steel industry. I emphasise that the EEA will broaden the opportunities available to United Kingdom steel makers, and that EFTA steel producers will be brought under the competition and state aid rules governing European Community industry. Some of the export restrictions which have protected the market for scrap and alloys in some EFTA countries to the advantage of their local producers will end. That is another positive point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South wondered where we are going. I emphasise that the agreement is worth while even if it is, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford suggested, short-term. Not least among the reasons why it is beneficial is that it will help the entry of EFTA countries that seek to join the Community. There is no question of the agreement in any way blocking applications.

The House has recognised that this is an excellent agreement. It is a substantial achievement by the Government. It will provide new opportunities for British business men, bring benefits to consumers, and help in the development of the new Europe.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That this House takes note of the proposals described in the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry on 30th December 1991, relating to the draft Agreement on the establishment of a European Economic Area; and supports the Government's view that the Agreement should be entered into by the Community and its Member States subject to agreement on amendments to the draft necessary to deal with incompatibilities between the draft and the Treaty of Rome identified by the Court of Justice in its Opinion 1/91.

Local Government Bill *[Lords]*
(Allocation of Time)

7.11 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Local Government Bill [*Lords*]:—

Committee

1.—(1) The Standing Committee to which the Bill has been allocated shall report the Bill to the House on 18th February.

(2) Proceedings on the Bill at a sitting of the Standing Committee on that day may continue until Midnight whether or not the House is adjourned before that time, and if the House is adjourned before those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion the Standing Committee shall report the Bill to the House on 19th February.

Report and Third Reading

2. The proceedings on consideration and Third Reading of the Bill shall be completed in one allotted day and shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

3.—(1) No Motion shall be made in the Standing Committee relating to the sitting of the Committee except by a member of the Government, and the Chairman shall permit a brief explanatory statement from the Member who moves, and from a Member who opposes, the Motion, and shall then put the Question thereon.

(2) On the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill in the Standing Committee the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question.

Order of proceedings

4. No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which proceedings in the Standing Committee or on consideration of the Bill are taken, except by a member of the Government, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Dilatory motions

5. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings on the Bill shall be made in the Standing Committee or on an allotted day except by a member of the Government, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Extra time

6. If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) stands over from an earlier day, paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Private business

7. Any private business which has been set down for consideration at Seven o'clock on an allotted day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business for a period of three hours from the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill or, if those proceedings are concluded before Ten o'clock, for a period equal to the time elapsing between Seven o'clock and the conclusion of those proceedings.

Conclusion of proceedings

8.—(1) For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings on the Bill which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time; the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill);

[Mr. John MacGregor]

(c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper in the name of any Member, if that amendment is moved or Motion is made by a member of the Government; and

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(3) If the allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which under this Order are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Supplemental orders

9.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to those proceedings.

(2) If on the allotted day the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before Ten o'clock, no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Saving

10. Nothing in this Order shall—

(a) prevent any proceedings to which the Order applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by the Order; or

(b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with on any day after the completion of all such proceedings on the Bill as are to be taken on that day.

Recommittal

11.—(1) References in this Order to proceedings on consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings at those stages respectively, for, on or in consequence of, recommittal.

(2) On the allotted day no debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Business Committee and Business Sub-Committee

12. Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) and Standing Order No. 103 (Business sub-committees) shall not apply to this Order.

Interpretation

13. In this Order—

"allotted day" means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the day, provided that a Motion for allotting time to the proceedings on the Bill to be taken on that day either has been agreed on a previous day, or is set down for consideration on that day;

"the Bill" means the Local Government Bill [*Lords*].

This is an important Bill, which implements parts of the citizens charter. The measures in part I will result in substantial improvements in the quality of local government. Part II initiates a review of the structure of local government in England that has been enthusiastically and widely welcomed. In many parts of the country—certainly in many parts that I have visited—local authorities and others are gearing themselves up for their hearings in front of the Local Government Commission and are anxious to get on with that.

The Government have no wish to curtail reasonable debate in Committees, but there is a clear difference between reasonable debate and filibustering. I have no doubt whatever that the Opposition by their tactics in Committee, have made a deliberate attempt to frustrate proper consideration of the Bill.

The Bill received thorough consideration in the other place—more than 40 hours in total, including almost 20 hours in Committee. The detailed record of the Committee stage so far in this House provides the clearest possible evidence of a blatant attempt by the Labour party to drag out Committee proceedings. *[Interruption.]*

The House will want to hear the facts. First, the Bill is a relatively short one of only 30 clauses. So far, the Committee has sat for 38 hours in nine sittings, and 30 hours have been spent on just four clauses. It is important to set the Opposition tactics in the context of the originally agreed pattern for Committee proceedings. Originally, six days were agreed for consideration in Committee, and that included five full days. The Government accepted that members of the Committee would want to have the opportunity to attend the debate on the revenue support grant settlement. For this reason, because that debate was postponed, two afternoon sessions were lost, but we readily agreed to add a seventh day to the Committee proceedings to make up for that lost time.

It is self-evident that a single day was adequate for the four clauses on competition. On any reasonable basis of parliamentary scrutiny, that was surely so—and any reasonable Opposition would have accepted that. But clauses 8 and 9 have taken eighteen and a half hours. It is clear that the Opposition embarked on a filibuster in full knowledge of the time allowed for the Committee stage.

The first 7 clauses deal with performance standards of local authorities. The Committee spent more than four hours on clause 1 and more than seven hours on clause 2, using up four morning sittings. Clauses 8 to 11 deal with the extension of compulsory competitive tendering to local authority professional services. The Committee finally reached clause 8 just after 7 pm during the fifth sitting on the afternoon of 6 February. The Committee then spent the next two full days on clauses 8 and 9. That included Tuesday 11 February, when the Committee continued until nearly 5 o'clock on Wednesday morning.

In total, clause 8 took ten and a half hours. Even this very limited progress during the marathon sitting on clause 8 was possible only because my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities moved the closure on two groups of amendments. One group of amendments on clause 8 took over seven hours. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) who is not present in the Chamber, led for the Opposition in the Committee. He opened with a one-hour speech, and had to be brought to order twice.

The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) spoke for 50 minutes. The hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) spoke for a second time and had to brought to order for repetition. The closure was clearly accepted by the Committee Chairman on the basis of lengthy consideration of one group of amendments.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Why does not the Minister tell the whole story about that debate? At the end of it, the Under-Secretary congratulated me on the quality of my submission and my knowledge of the subject under discussion.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State is well known for his generosity.

The lengthy debate did not stop with that group of amendments. Still on clause 8, the hon. Member for Brightside spoke for a further 55 minutes, and the hon. Member for Makerfield spoke for a further 1 hour 40 minutes and had to be brought to order.

The performance of Opposition Members was a parody of that well-loved radio programme, "Just a Minute". They used every form of deviation and repetition and plenty of hesitation to waste time. They many times broke the rule about continued use of the same word.

As the House knows, I believe in the sensible management of the legislative programme in the interests of the whole House. Under the timetable motion, there will still be a full day available to consider part II of the Bill. That will provide the same number of hours in Committee on those clauses as was spent on them in another place—that is, eight hours. The timetable motion does not prohibit further debate, but enables the original commitment to be completed.

The House will not be at all surprised to know that we are not prepared to prolong consideration of the Bill indefinitely to accommodate the Opposition's tactics. It is significant that the Committee accelerated its consideration of the Bill as soon as it was known that the timetable motion was being tabled. That shows what was going on. The Opposition's filibuster makes the motion inevitable, and I cannot believe that it comes as any surprise to any Opposition Member. I commend it to the House.

7.17 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): The Leader of the House is usually a courteous man, but he forgot to open his speech with a welcome. He should have said, "Welcome to the weekly guillotine debate," as such debates are a weekly occurrence on timetables enforced by the Government. He spoke about repetition and wasting the House's time. He might have acknowledged that the most repetitive business nowadays in the House is discussion of timetable motions imposed by himself.

This is the 36th such timetable motion, but repetition does not make them any more valid. We have noticed that the right hon. Gentleman's speeches of justification get shorter and shorter, to the point where they are almost an apology for what the Government are doing. I assume that before long he will be asking us to take guillotine motions on the nod as though they were matters of no controversy. That would be absolutely wrong, and it could not be more wrong in respect of local government legislation.

In the 13 wasted years of legislation from this Government, the area in which they have made the most horrendous errors in the largest number of Bills has been local government. In almost 60 Acts of Parliament during that time, an average of about five a year, the Government have made the most appalling errors, often steamrollering legislation through the House and coming to regret it bitterly afterwards. Perhaps the most outstanding example of all was the poll tax, but it was only one of many such pieces of legislation. The Government not only guillotined the poll tax in—they guillotined it out as well, thus creating parliamentary political history. Most parties can be forgiven at some stage in their period of office for wanting to guillotine their manifesto commitments in, but this Government made history by guillotining their manifesto commitment out.

Here we are again, with yet another guillotine debate. As the Leader of the House knows perfectly well, this is not so much about the Government wanting to get their business through, for which the right hon. Gentleman erroneously claimed widespread support, as about the Government's hidden timetable for an election on 9 April. That is what these successive timetable motions are all about. We read about Prime Ministerial jets and contracts ending on 10 April, and we know that the Government are in trouble with their timetable both here and in another place. This motion is all about a general election. It would do the right hon. Gentleman far more credit if he was candid with the House and the country and admitted as much.

Mr. MacGregor: Clearly, I do not know when the general election will be, but I know that we have a substantial programme of legislation in a shortened Parliament. That is the point that I have to take into account.

The hon. Gentleman has referred to the number of timetable motions that I have introduced. As he well knows, I am in favour of timetable motions for all legislation.

Dr. Cunningham: The right hon. Gentleman is not alone in that view, but that view has been put to the Select Committee on Sittings of the House on the basis of agreed procedures agreed within the Standing Orders of the House—not on the basis of the arbitrary and unilateral imposition of the timetables with which the right hon. Gentleman is obliged to proceed.

I suppose that we should exonerate the right hon. Gentleman to some extent as apparently he is an innocent. He knows that something important is happening on 9 April, but it seems that no one has told him what it is. All that he has been told is that he must get the business out of the House in time to accommodate what is to happen on 9 April. If the right hon. Gentleman does not realise that the Opposition and the public can see through that, he is deluding himself.

The right hon. Gentleman should be called not the Lord President but, in the words of Gilbert and Sullivan, the Lord High Executioner as he chops off one debate after another by means of these timetable motions.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the time taken discussing clause 8 in part I. We do not apologise for giving detailed scrutiny to clause 8, which is about competition and goes to the heart of our opposition to what is being proposed.

Talking of wasting time, I remind the Leader of the House that, thanks to the Government continually changing their mind on the timetabling of business in the Chamber, three potential half-days of Committee sittings were lost simply because of changes to the business in this place, which were entirely the fault of the Government's mismanagement and chopping and changing of business.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): Two, actually.

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman is right. The third half-day was lost because the Chairman of the Committee unfortunately got stuck in a traffic jam. We do

[Dr. Cunningham]

not hold the Chairman responsible for that, but if the Government had done something over the years about the traffic in London, that half-day might not have been lost. Whichever way we look at the problem, it comes down to the fault of Ministers in the end.

We make no apologies for taking time to scrutinise this legislation, especially in view of the Government's awful record of ineffectual—nay, highly damaging—local government, legislation over the past 13 years. As for the right hon. Gentleman's claim that one more day will be adequate to consider part II, I believe that that includes 18 clauses and four schedules. The House is being asked to agree to allocating one day to that. People outside this place who take an interest in proper scrutiny of legislation and the proper holding to account of the Executive—and even, I dare say, some fair-minded Tories—would say that it was asking for trouble to shove legislation through the House in that way without enough time for proper consideration. We do not accept that one further day is anything like reasonable to deal with part II.

While we object to the way in which business is being pushed through here, outside this House hundreds of thousands of people who have to work in local government and millions of people who depend in one way or another on local government services are very angry about what the Government have done through all this legislation. They have disabled many effective and efficient local authorities the length and breadth of the country, Conservatives as well as Labour. They have damaged the efficient provision of high-quality services by their dogmatic approach to compulsory competitive tendering, and they have prevented the millions of people who rely on local government services from receiving quality and regularity in the services that they require. We shall therefore make sure, so far as it is within our power to do so, that this Bill is given proper consideration.

The Leader of the House talked about the amount of time taken to consider the Bill in another place. That is a matter for their Lordships, but I have never heard any previous Leader of the House recommend that what had happened to legislation in another place should be the determining factor in what happens here. Government always have the right to introduce Bills in another place, but that is no guarantee of an easy passage in the House of Commons—nor should anyone assume that it ever would be.

The Government have made serious errors yet again in these proposals. My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), who has been speaking for us on these matters, and my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) have made that fact clear time and again. My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham does not serve on the Committee, but he was involved on Second Reading and elsewhere—*[Interruption.]*

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities mutters from a sedentary position about filibustering. The penultimate time we discussed one of these timetable motions, it was his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science who made the longest speech, as we discovered by checking. The Minister should therefore not be too anxious to mention the length of speeches—*[Interruption.]*—and he should certainly not persist in haranguing me from a sedentary position. If he wishes to intervene, I shall be happy to give way to him.

I am merely pointing out that there is plenty of evidence that, when necessary, Ministers are willing to take up more than enough of the time of the House to make their somewhat inadvertent and irrelevant points. As the Leader of the House referred to what is and is not relevant, he should pay a little more attention to the stream of spurious points of order made by his hon. Friends if he is concerned about expediting the business of the House.

Since the Leader of the House made his brief speech without providing any justification for this draconian timetable, and since he sought in no way to convince the House that 18 clauses and four schedules can be adequately scrutinised in one more day of Committee debate, I assume that he thinks, as has happened throughout this Parliament, that the Government can come along with their inbuilt majority and their rubber stamp and authenticate any decision that the Government take, however arbitrary, however unfair and however ill-advised it may be in terms of the proper scrutiny of legislation.

The day is quickly coming when the electors of our country will hold the Leader of the House and his right hon. Friends to account not only for all their local government legislation, the poll tax included, but for their mismanagement of the affairs of this country in general. When people have the chance to vote, this will be yet another nail in the Government's coffin.

7.30 pm

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): I deeply regret the need for a guillotine on this Bill—indeed, I deeply regret the need for a guillotine on any Bill. It is not the way to achieve high-quality legislation that has been well considered and that has had all the imperfections ironed out of it. I regret in particular the imposition of a guillotine part way through a Bill. In this case, it means that a disproportionate amount of time has been spent on considering the first part of the Bill and that the later stages, in particular part II, which is of great importance, will not now get the attention that they ought to have had and that they clearly merit.

I have absolutely no doubt whatsoever, however, that a guillotine is necessary. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House pointed out, if we had proceeded at the pace at which we were proceeding, and if, in particular, there had been any additional enormously long sittings devoted to one clause, we should have been here until, probably, midsummer before we completed our deliberations. The Committee proceedings on clause 8 represent a classic example of the abuse—if I can put it that way—of the procedures of this House.

I consider that it would be a much more efficient and economical use of the resources of the House if the amount of time to be allocated to a particular Bill were to be decided in advance. The time could then be allocated sensibly. If that is what my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House means by having a timetable for each Bill, I very much support his proposal.

I believe, too, that the method of debate employed in some Committees is not very well suited to ensuring that detailed revisions of legislation are made so that one ends up with good and well-considered legislation. The

confrontational approach that is adopted in Committee does not produce the high-quality legislation that the House ought to be capable of producing. In addition to the context in which we are holding the debate, very much broader issues are at stake as to how Committee debates are conducted. When these matters come, as they do from time to time, before the Select Committee on Procedure, I hope that a clear look will be taken at the way that Committee debates are conducted.

It seems to be abundantly obvious from the proceedings in Committee that the Labour party is against the Bill and that it wants to prevent it from making progress. It clearly tried to ensure that the maximum amount of time was devoted to considering part I in order to prevent us from——

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): I do not know whether my hon. Friend has had the same experience in his constituency as I have had in mine, but the image has been created in my constituency that the Labour party wants the Bill, yet down here the Labour party is doing everything possible to delay it. Has my hon. Friend had that experience?

Mr. French: My hon. Friend takes the exact words out of my mouth. I am coming to precisely that point and, if I am allowed to do so, I intend to enlarge upon it when I reach it.

First, however, let me say that part II, which establishes the local government commission, ought, in my judgment, to be given very careful consideration. However, it is precisely that part of the Bill that has not been given proper consideration, due to the overlong deliberations on part I.

I recall that, during the Second Reading debate on 20 January, the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) opposed the Bill. He said that he was against part I and described part II as "an even greater disappointment". However, it needs to be placed firmly on record that Labour party councillors throughout the country support the Bill, and particularly part II. Many of them are extremely keen to see the establishment of a Local Government Commission. They are also extremely keen to see the establishment of the unitary authorities that will result from the commission's deliberations.

The Labour party will have to make up its mind. Labour party councillors throughout the country want the Local Government Commission, as well as unitary status, where appropriate. Do those councillors therefore support the Opposition Front Bench spokesmen here, and the members of the Committee, who have been instrumental in blocking the Bill?

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): On the point that the hon. Gentleman makes regarding parts I and II. It has always been clear that the controversial part of the Bill relates to competitive tendering when it is compulsory competitive tendering. The lukewarm part of the Bill concerns the Local Government Commission. Would it not have been better, therefore, to introduce two Bills? The first would have provided for the creation of the Local Government Commission and would have gone through virtually on the nod. The second could have been debated for much longer in Committee, due to the controversial issues that it contained. This is only a bare bones of a Bill. It contains no affirmative procedure. That is why it has taken some time to explore the issues involved.

Mr. French: That is an ingenious solution which, were it to be applied, would get the Labour party off the hook, but that is not what happened. On account of the delays imposed upon the Committee in respect of part I, part II will not receive the consideration that it deserves. To me, that implies that the Labour party is not interested in part II being properly considered. It is not interested in obtaining a good part II. I have already referred to the fact that the hon. Member for Dagenham described part II as "an even greater disappointment" than part I. That does not suggest to me that he is pleased with part II; it implies that he has criticisms to make of it.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham) *indicated assent.*

Mr. French: One of the difficulties is that, because we are being denied the opportunity to debate part II, Members of Parliament in all parts of the House will be unable to make those criticisms of part II that they might have felt to be appropriate.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): The hon. Gentleman makes it appear that the Labour party has denied the Committee time to discuss the next stage of the Bill. If the hon. Gentleman feels that we ought to have more time to discuss part II, he ought to come over here and vote with us against the guillotine motion. If he wants more time for the Bill, he ought to try to persuade his right hon. Friend that the Committee needs more time to discuss part II.

Mr. French: The hon. Gentleman has obviously not been following my argument. Of course we want this part of the Bill to be debated, but so far the debate has done nothing but obstruct its consideration. We cannot continue in the same vein. There comes a point at which, if the Bill is to become law, as it clearly should, we have to make progress. That is why we are debating the guillotine motion. We should not be debating it now if so much time in Committee had not been consumed particularly on clause 8. Important though clause 8 is, it has thrown the Committee's deliberations and what ought to have been the normal timetable for the Committee out of all reasonable proportion. That is why we are in this position.

Labour councillors have expressed sympathy and support for part II of the Bill. Do they support Labour Front-Bench spokesmen in blocking the Bill, which would suggest that they are insincere in their declared support for the Local Government Commission and the prospect of unitary status, or do they genuinely believe in unitary status, as the Bill proposes? If so, will they disown the conduct of the parliamentary Labour party? Which is the genuine and true voice of the Labour party? It is speaking with two voices on this part of the Bill——

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): Only two?

Mr. French: There may be more, but I am perfectly content with those two, because they completely contradict each other.

It is incumbent on the Labour party to explain its attitude to the Local Government Commission and the prospect of unitary status. I hope that that question will be put to Labour councillors. Do they support the attitude

[Mr. French]

adopted by their own party in Parliament to part II of the Bill? If not, will they distance themselves from the conduct of Labour Members?

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I am a member of the Committee considering the Bill, but as far as I am aware, the hon. Gentleman has not made any comment on part I. He has no opinion on whether his constituents' pensions are taken away, or on compulsory competitive tendering.

Mr. French: I have views to express about part II. The speeches of Labour Members, including those of the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), have been so lengthy that, in the interests of progress, Conservative Members have not made long speeches. That underlines the defect in the approach to Committee work.

I believe that part II is at the heart of the Bill. I wish to debate the terms of reference of the Local Government Commission and its composition, which interests Labour Members, but, as matters are proceeding, I shall not have a chance to do so.

The hon. Member for Carlisle will know that I have tabled amendments on the terms of reference for the Local Government Commission as he has signed them. I am grateful for his support and for that of my hon. Friends, but it appears that we shall not have an opportunity to debate them.

Mr. Martlew: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is more vocal tomorrow than he has been at previous sittings; otherwise, the debate on the amendment that we move together will be very brief.

Mr. French: I have much to say about the amendment, but it would be out of order for me to put tonight the arguments that I intend to put tomorrow. I want the Local Government Commission to consider the position of historic cities, in which the hon. Member for Carlisle has an interest.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): The hon. Gentleman said that he has a lot to say on part II but criticised my hon. Friends for having a lot to say on part I. Why does he think that he has a right to say a lot on part II but that my hon. Friends should be excluded from saying a lot on part I?

Mr. French: It is a matter of relativity. What I describe as "a lot to say" is tiny compared with the interpretation of Labour Members. My interpretation would be a concise and relevant speech of about 10 minutes and no more. I think that I can put my arguments on historic cities in no more than 10 minutes. If I have an opportunity tomorrow, I shall do so.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) has not had the same opportunity as we have to listen to all these interesting speeches. He plainly does not understand that the difference between a long speech and a speech full of content is quite stark. If he takes the opportunity to read the long speeches, he will not find any content.

Mr. French: I agree with my hon. Friend entirely. Committee Chairmen are long-suffering and do their best in a difficult job, but I believe that they should be more robust in ruling material out of order.

Mr. Martlew: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member to criticise the Chairmen of a Committee in that way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): The hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) should not do so. I hope that he will withdraw those comments.

Mr. French: I withdraw that point, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

If members of Committees ensured that their comments were relevant, it would solve much of the problem, because their speeches would not be unduly long, and we could debate more of the Bill.

Mr. Clelland: I thought that I heard the Leader of the House criticising my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), yet, as my hon. Friend pointed out, the Minister congratulated him on the content of his speech.

Mr. French: That is because the Minister is courteous. It would be natural for him to express congratulations, but that does not mean that every part of the speech that the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) made was strictly relevant to the clause that he was addressing.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Labour Members may have missed the point that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary was making in congratulating the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney). I think that my hon. Friend was congratulating the hon. Gentleman on making a boring speech lasting only 50 minutes, rather than his usual boring speech of one hour and 40 minutes.

Mr. French: I am inclined to agree with the sentiments that my hon. Friend expresses.

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary said that the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) had spoken with his customary force and conviction. If the hon. Member for Makerfield was pleased with that comment, he must lack a sense of irony.

Mr. French: The Minister makes the point very well indeed.

I wish to conclude my remarks, because I should not wish to be open to the same criticism as I am making of Labour Members. I have made my point about the conduct of Committees and about the Labour party's deliberate attempts to prevent us from reaching part II of the Bill, which is so important.

7.48 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): The motion is against the best interests of local government. If we are to have meaningful local government legislation, Bills such as this should be allowed to proceed with the fullest possible discussion of their clauses.

The hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) may think that part I is not important, but Conservative and Labour councillors are concerned about the extension of compulsory competitive tendering under clause 8. In fact, we were told that PA Consultants advised the Government that not all the proposals for the further extension of compulsory competitive tendering were in the best interests of the people who depend on the services. We

dwelt on housing at some length, and questions were raised as to how consultation and compulsory competitive tendering would apply to it.

Primary legislation gives tenants' associations and co-operatives the right to consultation before any changes are made in the management or administration of their housing estates. When we asked for clarification and for the issues to be explained and qualified, we were told that the Minister for Housing and Planning would issue a consultation document in due course. That document should have been published in January, but it has not yet appeared. Therefore, the Committee had to discuss an issue without the evidence necessary for Members to make a decision on the very important issue of changing the management of local authority housing and how that will affect the tenants who depend on such housing for their welfare and quality of life.

Conservative Members such as the hon. Member for Gloucester had no comment to make on the important issue of local authority housing departments. I and many of my colleagues considered it to be a significant matter which should have been discussed in detail in Committee, but we were told that our questions could not be answered because the necessary information was not available. How can Conservative hon. Members expect the Opposition to accept such a situation when discussing clause 8?

If the Leader of the House had any respect for local government, he would join me and my colleagues in saying that the information required for us to make a judgment on clause 8 should have been put before the Committee. I want to register our deepest concern about the fact that the Government are steamrolling through legislation that is against the best interest of the people who depend on local government services.

I again put to the Leader of the House and to Ministers this question: will the tenants' associations and co-operatives have a say in the way in which compulsory competitive tendering will apply to the management of local authority housing services as laid down in primary legislation? Will they be given the opportunity to say whether they are satisfied with the present arrangements?

We have been told that, before the tenants were subject to a change of housing management, a vote should be taken among the tenants and the people who depend on local authority housing services and that, if a majority were against the change, it should not be implemented. Will that apply in the case of compulsory competitive tendering? If the majority of tenants do not want the current arrangements for housing management changed —those arrangements include letting and the reporting and repairs service—will their views be taken into consideration and accepted as laid down under current legislation?

The Leader of the House, who moved the guillotine motion, should be able to answer the simple questions being put by councillors—Labour and Tory—about how the extension of compulsory competitive tendering will apply to managerial services. The hon. Member for Gloucester is fully aware that similar questions were asked about police services but they were not answered. The same was true of questions on architectural services and on the provision and future of library services, so we had to keep pressing Minsters on those important matters under clause 8.

I remind members of the Committee that, when we were requesting information, some Conservative hon. Members intervened on me and my colleagues because of the importance of the points raised. We had no objection to the interventions. There was an exchange of views across the Committee. That is no reason for the Leader of the House to say that such exchanges should not take place on part II, which is what will happen if the guillotine motion is passed in its present form. There were lengthy discussions on clause 8, because it deals with compulsory competitive tendering and we wanted to ensure that there was clarification so that members of local authorities could read the report of the deliberations and be aware that we had not received information about the extension of compulsory competitive tendering.

When will we receive the response from the Minister for Housing and Planning about the provision of future housing management services for local authority housing departments. When may we have that report? It is clearly important, but we are being denied the information that is necessary to make a balanced judgment on the extension of compulsory competitive tendering.

Another issue which was raised by Labour members of the Committee should be taken into consideration. Consultative documents were issued to local authorities and other interested organisations for them to comment on, but the closing date of the consultation was 31 January 1992 and the Bill was in Committee before that date. As the hon. Member for Gloucester said, members of local authorities have commented on the White Papers and their comments have been submitted to the Department of the Environment, but the Committee has not had the opportunity to consider the results of the consultation. In the interests of democracy, how can Conservative Members say that there should be no time to discuss the Bill further when we are waiting to know exactly what people think about the proposed legislation?

We also mentioned voluntary organisations, which have expressed concern about clauses 8 and 9. Members of the Committee know the views of those organisations and their concern about how compulsory competitive tendering will apply to the services in which they are involved. Will provision be made in the contracts for the extension of compulsory competitive tendering to ensure that the support that voluntary organisations get from local authority departments will continue if private contractors take over the services?

We have raised the issue of the concern expressed by parish and town councils. Although it was promised in the White Paper that there would be provision for discussion on the involvement of parish and town councils, we have been denied that opportunity. Everyone has received letters from organisations, including parish and town councils, expressing disappointment about the fact that the Government have not fulfilled the promise made in the White Paper. We have reasons to question Ministers and to keep pressing for those questions to be answered.

We also asked why quality and cost should be separate and why there should be double enveloping. There has been no response to the points raised by Labour members of the Committee on those important issues. We are told tonight that, because we pressed those issues so vehemently in the debate on part I and because we took time to ensure that all those matters were put on record, we shall not have the opportunity to do so on part II. That shows the disgraceful way in which the Government are handling the Bill.

[Mr. William O'Brien]

I accept that all parts of the Bill, not just part II, are important to local government, and we must have the opportunity to discuss the Bill in full. Democracy as it should operate in this country is being denied to hon. Members tonight. All parties have an interest in local government, but it seems that the interest of Conservative Members is based on the guillotine motion. I do not want such a discussion of local government. The sooner that we allow more involvement for local government and more discussion on the provision of local government services, the better. That will come about on 9 April when there is a general election and a change of Government. We shall then allow people to discuss the important issues which affect the destinies and standard of living of many people. I ask the House to reject the motion.

8.2 pm

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): It is difficult not to believe that the opposition by Labour and Liberal Democrat Members to the timetable motion is synthetic. As hon. Members who were present at the start of the debate will know, the comments of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) seemed wholly sympathetic to the views of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. The hon. Gentleman seemed to feel that the House should increasingly consider the sensible timetabling of Bills such as the Local Government Bill. The Labour party claims, although its claim may be synthetic, that it wants most of the Bill to be on the statute book. Given the agendas of both main Opposition parties, their opposition to the Bill's twin sister, the Local Government Finance Bill which dealt with the abolition of the poll tax, was just about understandable. However, the substance of their objections—especially Labour's—to that Bill and its twin sister, the Local Government Bill, has never been truly clear.

What Labour wants to replace the poll tax with, other than the catchy but wholly meaningless phrase "fair rates", has never been clear or spelt out. After four or five years of internal wrangling within the Labour party, it is not clear what "fair rates" would mean. It has never been understood inside the House and it is certainly not understood outside the House. On the Local Government Bill, we have had opposition for its own sake. The time taken so far to examine the clauses makes it clear that Labour and the Liberal Democrats have wished to ensure that, given the time left to this Parliament, the Bill will fall.

We are addressing two main issues: first, the citizens charter with its related competitive tender and, secondly, the structural and boundary reforms which, it is said, we all want.

Mr. Gould: Did you write this?

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Yes, as a matter of fact, I did.

Mr. Gould: It is very good.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: That is most kind.

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Lords Commissioner to the Treasury): Give him a signed copy.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I will.

The Labour party has argued, for outside consumption, that it is against not competitive tendering, but compulsory competitive tendering. [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] I am grateful for the sedentary confirmation of that. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment said on Second Reading, replying to the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay), if it is just competitive tendering, the Labour party will not do it, but if it is compulsory competitive tendering, it will have to do it. That is the substance of the debate.

Mr. Clelland: The hon. Gentleman must know that, throughout the years, local government, under the control of whichever political party, has been involved in competitive tendering. It is the compulsory element to which we object. The hon. Gentleman refers to part I. Does he agree that it is part I that is contentious? Does he also agree that we should spend time debating the contentious issue? The Government are not immune to making mistakes on local government legislation, so it should be debated in depth. Does the hon. Gentleman not find it curious that the Government want to rush through the contentious issues to get to the provisions which are not contentious—and on which the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) wants to spend a lot of time?

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: It is perfectly true that competitive tendering has been available to local authorities for many years—that is not in dispute—but the Bill seeks to ensure that all people, under whichever local authority they live, have the benefit of competitive tendering. The only way to ensure that is to make it the law that such tendering is compulsory. There are exceptions—the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone has always defended his local authority, perhaps rightly—but the vast majority of Labour authorities simply will not carry out competitive tendering.

To give an example, in the run-up to one of our recent local elections, the Labour party in Nottingham feared that it would lose. In a panic, it quickly did a deal with the cleansing department which saved our local authority no less than £400,000. The only reason why it made the effort to save that money was that it feared that the Conservatives would win the local election and that we might go out to some form of tendering. I submit that that is proof positive that Labour councils do the right thing only when we force them to do so. Compulsory competitive tendering is one of the mechanisms that we must have on the statute book to ensure that everyone gets a fair deal from their local authority.

Mr. Martlew: The hon. Gentleman must have been resting during our long debate in Committee. Did not my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) point out that more than 3,000 tenders had gone out and that there were only 30 at most—1 per cent.—to which the Government had any objection? The legislation is already in place for CCT. The Bill merely tightens the screw, and it is nonsense to pretend otherwise.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but I am not sure quite what point he is making.

The Bill provides that, no matter where they live, local ratepayers or local taxpayers—whatever the means by which the finance is raised—have the benefit of compulsory competitive tendering arrangements, which will ensure that they get a fair deal. It must surely be the duty of the House to ensure that.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: My hon. Friend will no doubt wish to take the opportunity to welcome one of the part-time members of the Committee, the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) to the debate.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is returning to his place.

Mr. McCartney: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Not for the first time, the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) has made outrageous remarks about the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti). The hon. Gentleman is not a member of my party, but I feel that it is vital that remarks made in the House should not denigrate or give a false impression of an hon. Member's conduct in this place. Only a moment ago, the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) accused the hon. Member for Eastbourne of being involved in a filibuster. Now the hon. Member for Harrow, East accuses him of being a part-time member of the Committee. Yet he was neither. Conservative Members are simply engaging in party political activities——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not aware of any matter arising from that that is a matter for the occupant of the Chair.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: You will see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from the length of that so-called point of order, precisely why Conservative Members have complained about filibustering in Committee. I confess to an admiration for the way in which the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) can pour out a torrent of words for hours on end—for what purpose, I know not. If a medal were to be awarded, it would certainly go to the hon. Member for Makerfield, who has taken over the mantle of an hon. Member who retired from the House a few years ago and who was a genius when it came to filibustering. That accolade now passes to the hon. Member for Makerfield. I merely add that the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) is perfectly capable of defending himself, and will no doubt do so when he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There ought not to be any argument about the fact that the public are entitled to have, and be seen to have, value for their money—and that means compulsory competitive tendering. The long-winded case against CCT has been nothing more than rear guard action to ensure that many —though not all—local authorities can go on in their own sweet way, measuring need and the delivery of service by the old Labour party yardstick of the amount of money that they spend. That seems to be the only yardstick that the Opposition have ever had: if one spends more, it must be a better service—if one spends less, one is cost-cutting. They have never understood value for money.

Let me give an example to which I have referred previously. Our own Labour authority in Nottinghamshire, working from desktops on unchecked and untendered for building work needed in our old people's homes, would rather announce their closure—as it disgracefully did—than obtain outside quotations and find out what it would cost to do the work required. *[Interruption.]* I will gladly give way to the hon. Member for Makerfield if he wishes me to—he has spent an entire paragraph of my speech rabbiting from the Back Bench.

Mr. McCartney: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not accuse me of filibustering. He rarely speaks in the House and even when he does, he never speaks up for Nottingham. He always denigrates it and finds excuses to attack Labour councillors. Come 9 April, the people of Nottinghamshire will sort him out.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I do not know whether to laugh or cry. If there is one hon. Member who speaks up for his city, I am he. My one criticism and my one sadness is that the queen of the midlands is oppressed by Labour-controlled city and county councils, and I cannot wait for the day when we get rid of both of them.

A few Labour Members at county hall—there are some honourable men among our Labour councillors, although not the Labour county councillor who is the prospective parliamentary candidate for my constituency——

Mr. Clelland: We did not think that you would like him.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I do not.

Some members at county hall had their consciences pricked over the possible closure of our old people's homes and joined my Conservative colleagues on the county council to vote that outrageous proposal down. Had there been compulsory competitive tendering, that situation might never have arisen. It will certainly not arise in future, because I know from the outside quotations that we have had for the work on the old people's homes that it would come comfortably within the budget that the authority already has available to it. Even the Labour councillors are beginning to feel ashamed at the dreadful pressures that they put on all the residents of those 12 homes while the matter was being debated at county hall in Nottinghamshire.

The Bill began in the other place and was considered in considerable detail there. The Opposition can hardly say, therefore, that they have not had a chance to examine its substance and properly to air their grievances and table amendments. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) said, with the time that they have taken so far, they have denied us the opportunity properly to consider part II.

My hon. Friend might well have referred in his excellent speech to the fact that part II refers to the Audit Commission which, strangely, the Labour party wishes to abolish the Audit Commission, although it is one of the greatest protections that the public have. I cannot for the life of me understand the logic of that, but that is another good reason why the Bill must not be allowed to fall through lack of time left in this Parliament.

The main purpose of part II of the Bill is to give us the means by which we can restore or create single-tier unitary authorities wherever it is found appropriate. That is a process that we cannot afford to delay. My constituents, living in one of the finest cities in the country—I say that again for the benefit of the hon. Member for Makerfield —and in the urban areas around our city, which constitutes the real capital of the east midlands, want to throw off the shackles of county hall. They simply do not understand or want councillors from Worksop, Mansfield and Retford making decisions that are rightly for the people of Nottingham—or south Nottinghamshire—whatever the ultimate decision may be.

Of course those northern councillors want to do the best that they can for their towns—that is right and proper —but I submit that they should no longer have the power to make those decisions at the expense of my constituents living within the city of Nottingham. The sooner the Bill

[Mr. Brandon-Bravo]

reaches the statute book, the happier my constituents will be, and I believe that that view is held throughout south Nottinghamshire.

Blocking the Bill will cost the Labour party dear. Labour will not get away with the publicity in my locality and bogus amendments to put teeth into the citizens charter. We all know that Labour opposes the charter.

Labour Members will not get away with claiming that they support single-tier authorities. The controlling Labour group at county hall provided funds for county hall to produce self-congratulatory pamphlets with the express purpose of trying to preserve the county's existence. Labour cannot have it both ways. A Labour authority cannot spend public money to maintain its existence while Labour Members of Parliament state in the House that they want single-tier authorities.

Mr. Martlew: The hon. Gentleman must recall that it was a Conservative Government who, in 1972 and 1973, proposed the local government reorganisation that is now being altered. Does the hon. Gentleman not accept any responsibility for that?

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Yes, we got it wrong. Many Conservative Members and Conservatives around the country believed that local government should be reorganised in the early 1970s, but we did not believe that there should be the same solution throughout the country. That is exactly what the present Government have recognised. We cannot claim that everywhere must have precisely the same solution. That is precisely what part II of the Bill addresses. Some areas may continue to have two-tier authorities, if that is right and proper for them and if that is what the local people want, but there is no doubt that a two-tier structure is not the answer in Nottinghamshire. It was wrongly imposed in the early 1970s. The Conservative party has at least had the courage to say that it was wrong, we must put it right and we must not delay further.

Mr. Clelland: If the hon. Gentleman is big enough to admit that the Conservative Government were wrong in 1972 and that they were wrong in respect of the poll tax —another piece of infamous local government legislation —is it not a little unwise of the Government to rush through yet another measure which is also wrong?

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: No, there is no logic in that view. One of the great tragedies in this House is that so few of us have run businesses. When one runs a business, one is aware that one makes mistakes, but one does not dwell on them. If one makes a wrong decision, one simply says, "Stop—cut your losses and move on to something new." I wish that we in politics were more able to admit that something we did a few years ago was wrong and that we should put it right as quickly as we can. There is no shame in that.

One of the problems in politics is that it takes so long for us to admit that we got something wrong. We were wrong to impose a similar structure throughout the country in the 1970s. The Government recognise that, and we are establishing a system which will ensure that we get it right this time.

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): Is not one of the attractions of the Bill the fact that, by creating the Local Government Commission, we provide an opportunity for freedom of choice in local areas so that people in different parts of the country can choose different solutions? It is a question not of rushing through a single prescription, but of creating a framework in which choice can be exercised.

While I have the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo)——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Briefly, please.

Mr. Coombs: Of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I wish to raise a point which arises from our discussions. My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South has referred to a mistake which he alleges that the Conservative party made in 1972. We have learnt from our mistakes, but the Labour party refuses to learn from its mistakes. Labour is still determined to have regional government and to impose another tier upon it, which will be——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions should be brief. Let us return to the motion before the House.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs). His intervention stands freely and requires no comment from me. I do not disagree with him at all.

The Bill must make progress. I therefore support the timetable motion without reservation.

8.24 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): There seems to be a sense of deja vu on the Conservative Benches. This must be about the 60th motion to curtail debate on a Bill in the past five years, and most of those motions have related to local government matters. On each occasion, the motion has been dictated by political considerations on the Government Benches.

The Government's arrogance in Committee is clear. When hon. Members attempt to debate issues, they are met with silence or with occasional sedentary interventions in the form of caustic remarks from Conservative Members. If, in Committee, Opposition Members did not participate in a debate, the Minister tried to curtail the debate, causing the Committee to progress to the next clause. Opposition Members could not win no matter what happened. If Opposition Members did not wish to participate in a debate, the Government would not initiate one.

That is precisely what happened on 11 February. Without consultation, and of their own volition, the Government decided that the debate would continue not till 10 pm—as had previously been agreed—or to 11 pm, midnight or 1 am, but until 5 am. However, there was a tacit and clear policy, in that Back-Bench Conservative Members did not participate in the discussions. Therefore, Back-Bench Opposition Members had to shoulder the responsibility of examining the Bill.

When it comes to considering amendments in Committee, Conservative Members are gutless. They have failed to scrutinise the Bill. The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) has admitted that mistakes were made. That was big of him, but such mistakes would not have been made if amendments had been considered properly in Committee and if Conservative Members had shown any desire to participate in the debates to scrutinise the Bill.

From the Government's point of view, we have an elected dictatorship. Whatever the Secretary of State says goes. If the Government cannot get their legislation through quickly, they can always introduce a guillotine. That is why Conservative Members cannot make a case tonight. So far, we have simply heard a litany of personal attacks on Opposition Members. My hon. Friends and I take it as a badge of pride when Conservative Members try to denigrate our contributions in this place and in Committee. I believe that that shows that we are on the right course.

I do not intend to apologise for referring to safety in the fire service. Why should I apologise for referring to men and women who daily try to save lives? They save the lives of about 700 people a year, and they save another 10,000 people from serious injury. I have been personally attacked in this House for trying to ensure that, when compulsory competitive tendering is introduced in the fire service, it protects equipment and the maintenance of equipment which saves the lives of firefighters and those who are unfortunately involved in fires. If it is being boring to attack the principle by which the Committee operates, then I plead guilty.

We must also consider CCT in the police service and the fact that that service believes that the Government are wrong to force the police service into areas of CCT which will affect security. If it were not for Opposition Members, the professional advice that the Government have received from the fire service and the police service would never have seen the light of day. Conservative Members object to Opposition Members being able to place on the public record the advice that the Government have received from their professional advisers who say that the Government are wrong. If it were not for Opposition Members, that advice would not have come to light.

Why have the Government failed in Committee to give any public commitment to publish consultants' reports in respect of the legislation? The reason is that the consultants have made it clear to the Government that the way in which they are proceeding with the Bill is a mistake and a serious error in administrative, financial and political terms.

Their arrogance is such, after 13 years in power, that the Government will listen to no one. They will take advice from no one—they will certainly not take advice from Opposition Members. When advice becomes politically embarrassing, they close the debate. That has happened in Committee.

As the debate unfolds, the Government become more and more embarrassed. We are able to produce evidence of the disasters of compulsory competitive tendering in councils, irrespective of political control or region, or whether they are county councils, non-metropolitan councils or metropolitan councils. There have been disasters in terms of the quality of service, the wages and conditions of those who are trapped in compulsory competitive tendering and the pressures being placed on local authorities even when they win a tender. Tenders are won at the cost of the delivery of service. The Government hate the fact that public scrutiny is taking place and they want to close the debate.

The hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) made an interesting assertion. He believes that there is a need for Committee procedures to be changed, that this is an intellectual debate and that he is very sorry that it had to take place. The Government have had 13 years to change procedures and to come up with proposals to ensure the proper consideration of legislation and to protect the rights of Back-Bench Members, of minority groups and of the official Opposition, but they have failed to do so—because it is not in their interests to do so.

The Government are not prepared to have open government or open debate in Committee. They want to protect the system as long as it protects their position. The hon. Member for Gloucester cannot have it both ways. He cannot complain to hon. Members that he will not have sufficient time to take part in the debate on part II of the Bill when he himself has connived, and will connive tonight, at ensuring that there is no proper consideration of it.

What is at stake in the first part of the Bill are two major clauses—clauses 8 and 9—which are at the heart of the proposals. That is why Opposition Members are insisting on a proper debate on those clauses. Unlike the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo), I have read the legislation. I am surprised that, as a Conservative Member, he did not realise that this is an extension of a piece of legislation that has been in operation since 1988.

Compulsory competitive tendering has been in operation since 1988. The legislation is about extending the scope of services and the way in which the Government through the Secretary of State control tendering procedures. That is what we objected to in Committee. Much of clause 8 is enabling legislation. Let us have more information in it. Each time we have asked questions, the relevant Minister has said, "We are still in consultation; we will bring forward statutory instruments on that."

By that sleight of hand—that casual brushing aside of the political debate—in one week the Government protect themselves from proper scrutiny of the legislation. As we saw with the poll tax, with statutory instruments they forced through, without any debate, fundamental changes in the structure of local government. That leads to complete disaster—not only political disaster, but, more important, disaster in the fair operation of local government as an institution and a deliverer of services.

Mr. Clelland: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for enlightening the House on what has been going on in Committee as opposed to the filibustering that we now hear from Conservative Members. Does my hon. Friend agree that it may be a good policy on our part to send copies of the Committee's proceedings to fire authorities, police authorities and local councils in areas represented by Conservative Members who serve on the Committee? Those authorities and perhaps the local press in those areas will see the contributions that have been made by my hon. Friends and compare them with those by Conservative Members, which I suspect would not fill one sheet of A4 paper.

Mr. McCartney: My hon. Friend has a good idea, but I can put his mind at rest: that is already happening. In my postbag, I have received contributions from people in the Strangers Gallery stating that, if it were not for Opposition Members, their views about the legislation would never have been put.

Professional associations representing architects wrote the Government a detailed paper about the way in which the Government were seriously undermining architects' departments in local authorities. Did the Minister publish

[Mr. McCartney]

that document? Did the Minister refer to it either on Second Reading or in our debate on clause 8 in Committee? Not a bit of it. It was left to Opposition Members to set out the position of architects and professional advice to the Government.

The same applies to the fire service, the police and local authority associations. On every occasion, the Government failed to take account in proper debate of the views of people outside. That is despite the fact that the Government are introducing legislation which changes large sectors of local authority delivery of services, and the consultation procedure has not been completed.

The Government are passing legislation without asking local authority associations, fire services, police services, voluntary organisations, local authorities, parish councils, or town councils their view on the legislation. The Bill will be law before their views have had an opportunity to be expressed properly unless Opposition Members are given that opportunity during the passage of the Bill.

Have hon. Members ever heard of such a situation? The offer of open government through the citizens charter and the procedure for public comment has ended after the Bill becomes law. That is a sham. The Government have already decided the principles of the Bill. They have no intention of allowing a proper debate on the consequences of it. This is only a bit of window dressing in the run-up to the election. That is what this pernicious guillotine motion is about: the Government are desperately clearing the decks for a general election.

The Government have no advantage in containing the debate upstairs, because each day more and more embarrassing information comes out about their proposals. For example, last Thursday, the Government sought to change clause 9 to allow a calumny about local authorities which, to some extent, was continued by the hon. Member for Nottingham, South: that, over the past three years, local authorities had been cheating in some way in their operation of compulsory competitive tendering and we therefore need a change in the law. They said that they had to do something to get rid of those local authorities' anti-competitive practices, yet in the debate that Conservative Members did not want, the truth was that of more than 3,000 tendering procedures that were investigated, only 30—about 1 per cent.—required any action or proposed action by the Government.

That was the excuse for dramatically changing, without consultation, major sectors of local government services such as housing, architectural services and a host of legal and administrative services—a change of the law based on an outright misrepresentation of the facts. That is why Conservative Members do not like the debate: because we find out the truth. We find out that the Government have nothing more than blind ideology when it comes to the continuation of this piece of legislation.

I now refer to what will happen from tomorrow onwards. Much has been said about the way in which we shall proceed. It would take much to convince me and other hon. Members that the Government are serious about a fundamental review of local goverment other than for political reasons, in the light of the way in which 13 years of Tory attacks on local government have undermined the concept of public service in the United Kingdom.

The Tories' record is not good. When they lost control of metropolitan authorities, they abolished them. When they lost control of Greater London local authorities, they abolished them. The legislation is not about a commission to improve local government services. For Conservative Members, it is a short-term, ideological set-up whereby they will examine county councils in non-metropolitan areas that are controlled by Labour. They are already fingering some local authorities not because they do not provide proper services but because they are controlled by Labour. If the Government cannot win in the ballot box, they abandon the ballot box.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McCartney: I give way to the hon. Member for MI5.

Mr. Allason: How does the hon. Gentleman square that slightly paranoid view of the reconstruction of local government with the position in counties such as Devon, where a substantial proportion of the local authorities are Conservative-controlled at both district and county level? In Devon, we feel that there is great duplication, especially in the control and supply of services. All we are after is one sensible unitary authority. Surely that is nothing to do with politics but is the desire to provide our constituents and people in individual wards with a sensible, proper service, combined with a sensible, proper system of accountability.

Mr. McCartney: In the light of some of the hon. Gentleman's writings, he is the last one to accuse anyone in the House of being paranoid.

Mr. Allason: I have read the hon. Gentleman's file, and it is all right.

Mr. McCartney: If one were to believe what the Minister, the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) and other Conservative Members on the Committee believe, it would be a pretty boring file.

Mr. Allason: There was an interesting telephone conversation two years ago.

Mr. McCartney: I had an even more interesting one last night, but we will deal with that in a moment.

I would go along with the hon. Gentleman if his record and that of his hon. Friend was one that we could trust. I am sure that, in his time, the hon. Gentleman has deliberately voted with the Government for the abolition of many local authorities. The Opposition want to get rid of the Government's political inclination to tamper only with Labour-controlled local authorities.

I believe in a root-and-branch review of local government services. I believe in unitary authorities. I believe in bringing services down to as local a level as possible to take account of the need to have a financial base and a land base on which to implement strategic policy decisions. So I have no argument with the hon. Gentleman about the concept in principle, but I worry about the political ideology behind the Government's position.

For example, at present the Bill makes no provision for local communities to appeal against decisions by the commission. That is fundamental if one is serious about local decision-making. The commission will be able to

make fundamental changes to a council, abolish it or amend it. Local people will have no procedure by which to appeal against that decision. At least with the present Local Government Boundary Commission there is a procedure for appealing against its decisions. If the Government are serious about local government and consideration by local people, why have not they provided a proper procedure to appeal against a decision to abolish an authority?

Mr. Clelland: Does my hon. Friend also agree that we are right to be worried about the impartiality of the commission because the Secretary of State for the Environment has already pre-empted the commission's decisions by expressing the view that Cleveland and Humberside will be abolished under its recommendations? He said that even before the commission was set up.

Mr. McCartney: My hon. Friend is right. Irrespective of one's position and whether a decision is right, it is no job of the Secretary of State, in advance of setting up the commission, to set down as its first term of reference the political abolition of certain local authorities. That is why Opposition Members want to ensure proper scrutiny and create safeguards.

We want to prevent the Government—this Government or any future Government, and whatever their political complexion—from interfering in any way for political considerations in decisions to amend local government boundaries and the local communities served by local units of administration. That is vital. Otherwise, we are going into the business of gerrymandering of local authority communities. Let us be frank: that is what happened to the metropolitan counties, and in my area, we had to live with the consequences.

I represented a metropolitan council area. Our democratic authority was abolished forthwith. Out of it, a series of quangos has been set up. They are unelected, but they have the resources and powers to determine basic services—whether fire, police, transport or waste disposal services. Not a single vote is cast in respect of the decisions of those bodies. They spend millions and millions of pounds. That is the Government's record in reorganisation of local government. I am sure that the hon. Member for Gloucester does not want to say that that record will continue with the local government commission.

One of the Government's serious proposals is that, in making wholesale amendments to unitary authorities, it will be necessary to have many former county facilities controlled by the districts. I want to ensure that, when several district councils are involved in delivering a countywide service, there is some democratic accountability in the provision of services and the development of policy, and that the local community has some say in the way in which money is spent on that service.

So Opposition Members need make no apology for the way in which we have scrutinised the Bill so far.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. Is he aware that one of the strongest wills in my area to see the abolition of the county authority and the establishment of a unitary authority is that of the Labour-controlled South Derbyshire district council? It has had enough of decisions being taken on its behalf by idiots a long way away, be they of its party or not.

Mr. McCartney: I have no objection to that. I do not know what the hon. Lady is complaining about. All we are saying is that we want the structure of the commission, its membership and democratic control, the style of membership, and its knowledge of local government to be correct. More important, when the commission comes to decisions, we want local Conservative associations, Liberal and Labour parties, community groups, tenants' groups and so on to have an opportunity to challenge the commission's views or to put alternative views to it.

With all due respect, the 35 wisest men and women in Britain will be on that commission, but they do not know everything about every local community in Britain. Why should they? If South Derbyshire want a unitary authority, I am happy with that. All I am saying is that, when the commission makes its proposals for the area, the people of South Derbyshire should have an opportunity to say whether the proposals are right and fair.

I therefore hope that the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) will come into the Lobby with us tonight against the guillotine motion. If it is accepted, the consideration of the Bill that she and I want will never take place. I hope that she will take that into account, and I am sure she will. I am sure that she is not just a hackette for the Government.

I wish to give an example of the value of debate—this is not only my view but that of the Minister. He and I took part in a debate for perhaps 30 minutes at about 3 o'clock in the morning on the de minimis rule, which excludes services up to a value of £100,000 from compulsory competitive tendering. That rule was introduced by the Government in 1988 to protect small district councils. At the end of the debate, the Minister of State said that the only reason that we had been able to sort out a serious problem was the debate that we had had. That is what Opposition Members are about. We want to engage the Government in an appropriate debate about the major issues before the Committee.

Compulsory competitive tendering is not only a contentious issue: it goes to the heart of the principle of delivery of public services in Britain. Unless the delivery of services is subject to proper public scrutiny, even if the Government force the Bill through, the Bill will not be worth a row of beans if in practice it undermines the ability of local authorities to provide services. Is not that the fundamental test when it comes down to it? Irrespective of political ideology, when legislation leaves the House, the test is whether in practice it is better than the legislation that preceded it—whether it will ensure better services, better scrutiny of services and better value for money. The way in which the Government are proceeding means that the Bill will fail on all three counts.

The Government will lose politically, but more importantly, local government will lose. The public who believe in and require the services will be the biggest losers, because the scrutiny in the House does not do justice to the major changes that the Government seek to force on the British public.

8.49 pm

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): Conservative Members have come to recognise the regular hollow protests by the Opposition at the use of the guillotine. What we have seen in this debate, what we saw last week, and what we may see again—I do not know, and

[Mr. James Paice]

my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will know better than I—is the recognition by the Labour party of what will happen on 9 April, 7 May, or whenever. If there were to be a Labour Government after the general election, they would wish to use guillotines. Their fervent opposition to guillotine motions shows their recognition that they will not, in a few short weeks, be on the Government Benches and able to demand their own guillotines.

Mr. Martlew: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Paice: Not for a minute—I have only just started.

What also proves the hollowness of arguments against guillotine motions is that often the debate on the motion takes time from the debate on amendments. Although that is not the case with this debate, it has often happened with other timetable motions.

Like those of my hon. Friends who have spoken today, I welcome this timetable motion. I believe that every Bill should be timetabled from day 1. That would be far better than introducing a timetable halfway through a Bill. However, the motion had to be introduced tonight, for all the reasons that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House outlined when he detailed the waste of time that we have already had.

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) urged the Government to come clean and say that this is all part of a campaign to clear the decks before a general election. We are led to believe that the Labour party is looking forward to the general election. The Leader of the Opposition keeps encouraging the Prime Minister to call a general election. The Opposition cannot have it both ways. If they want a general election and believe that the Bill should become law—they are in favour of the part that the Committee has not reached—they should acknowledge that there is no option other than to timetable the remaining stages. The agreement made through the usual channels has come asunder, but what the timetable motion proposes is in line with that agreement—with the one exception that the original agreement did not envisage the Committee sitting until 5 o'clock one morning.

Mr. McCartney: That was the Government's decision.

Mr. Paice: That may be so, but it was still extra time on top of the original agreement about the proceedings of the Bill.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): What agreement?

Mr. Paice: If the timetable that was agreed through the usual channels—the two Whips Offices—was wrong, why was it agreed in the first place?

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Paice: The hon. Gentleman is on record as saying that he is no longer a Whip but only a Back Bencher, so there is no point in giving way to him while I am speaking about the usual channels.

Only on Thursday last did we finish the part of the Bill dealing with competitive tendering, and we have not yet reached the part dealing with the Local Government Commission. Many people would gain if they could stand the boredom of the tedious and long-winded speeches to which the Committee has listened and which are recorded in *Hansard*. The Opposition have spent vast amounts of time detailing local government services and experiences of contracts that have gone wrong. They have detailed the odd examples where the service has been below standard or the contract has broke down, and have blamed that on compulsory competitive tendering, but that is not the truth of the matter. The fault lies with the contract that is up for tender. If the documents are properly drawn up, one is able to enforce higher standards and to deal with the problems that may arise.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not speaking to the motion before the House. I hope that he will quickly get back to it.

Mr. Paice: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I take your remonstrations.

The Committee has spent a considerable amount of time-wasting on matters not directly related to the Bill.

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman is wasting time.

Mr. Paice: I am sure that if I am wasting time you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will call me to order. If we cannot talk about what has gone on in relation to the Bill so far as justification for a timetable motion, I wonder——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot say that many speeches in the Committee did not deal with matters arising from the Bill and then hope to be able to reiterate those debates when the House is considering the guillotine motion.

Mr. Paice: I am not suggesting that they did not arise from the Bill. I am saying that they are examples of the way in which, while debating amendments, Labour Members spent far too long on minor details rather than addressing the issues. They could have said what they wanted in a much shorter time.

We have not yet reached the part of the Bill dealing with the Local Government Commission. Labour Members such as the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) have expressed support in principle for this, and he expressed concern about certain aspects of its structure and accountability. I do not think that there will be much dissent across the Floor of the Committee when we get to this tomorrow because most hon. Members welcome that part of the Bill.

Already, the chief executive of my local authority has phoned me saying, "For goodness sake, you have to get this Bill through before the general election. The Local Government Commission must be set up to look at unitary authorities." I believe that unitary authorities will be the primary means of providing local services, although they will not necessarily be the perfect solution for every part of the country.

Mrs. Currie: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not just the Local Government Commission that is important and urgent, but the compulsory competitive tendering provisions in the first part of the Bill? A small unitary authority will in the future be able to succeed because of CCT. It will not have to be a provider of services because it will be able to use CCT to ensure that it gets high-quality services and good value for money simply by buying in whatever appears to it to be necessary.

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend is right. There is no need for any local authority to have any service provision within its systems. It should simply be an agency buying in provision from whatever source it thinks best. I see no need for a local authority to have vast, wasted bureaucracies sorting out the provision of services when it should be ensuring that it obtains for the people whom it is elected to serve the most cost-effective way to deliver services and the best value for money. As my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) says, if that means a small authority with only a small nucleus of officials buying in and doing the job, so be it.

Mr. Allason: How does my hon. Friend think that the enabling authorities would be able to cope with providing a service the importance of which was highlighted on last night's Independent Television News? In Birmingham, a local authority is providing a phone-in service enabling people who cannot remember a tune and are annoyed by it to telephone from all over the world. A team of nine NALGO members is permanently available to find out what the tune is.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that we have got the point.

Mr. Paice: No doubt my hon. Friend is asking me a rhetorical question. As he well knows, it should not be the function of any publicly elected body to provide such a service. He has put his finger on another critical aspect of the Bill. He referred to nine NALGO members—[HON. MEMBERS: "Not enough."] It may not be enough—perhaps the demand for the service is so great that 10 or 12 should have been provided. In the event of a return to the trade union laws of the 1970s, however, those nine members could themselves demand another half-dozen, or even 20.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have made it clear that hon. Members must speak about the motion. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will now address himself to it.

Mr. Paice: I will return to the subject of the Local Government Commission and unitary authorities.

Hon. Members should not fool themselves. They should not assume that the House has been misled into believing that the Local Government Commission legislation could be pushed through in no time. Much of the debate has already taken place in the other place, whose primary function is to act as a scrutinising body. We know that it could not reject the principle—[HON. MEMBERS: "It is unelected."] It may be unelected, but it contains a cross-section of people of considerable ability, experience and knowledge. Members of the other place possessing those attributes have already been through the Bill, and have examined many of the concerns that have been expressed about the structure of the Local Government Commission.

The timetable motion was inevitable. It probably became inevitable on the occasion of the Committee's second sitting, when it was clear that we would make very slow progress. If the Bill—and, in particular, the part which involves the Local Government Commission—is to become law before the general election, whenever that takes place, it is essential that the motion be passed today.

9.1 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate, although I am very sad that we shall not be given an opportunity to scrutinise the Bill properly.

I do not believe that Conservative Members are carrying out the job that they were elected to do. If doing the job properly means having to stay up throughout the night to scrutinise legislation, I am prepared to do that, but Conservative Members appear to tire very easily. Perhaps they are worried about getting back to their constituencies.

If I have to stay up for a long time to debate the living standards of working people—for instance, when the Government are trying to introduce compulsory competitive tendering—I am prepared to do that. I am prepared to argue for as long as it takes that people's wages and holidays should not be cut, and that sick pay and pensions should not be taken away from them. That is what much of our earlier debate was about. There was no filibuster as such; we had a lengthy debate, in which great concern was expressed for working people.

Such concern seems to be expressed only by Opposition Members. Conservative Members do not seem to give a tinker's cuss. They are not bothered about whether their constituents have to take a cut in wages, as long as they can be seen to be going out to the private sector. I could reel off numerous examples, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but you would rule me out of order if I did, because a number of other hon. Members wish to speak. I shall content myself with saying that to suggest that debate should be curtailed because Opposition Members have not taken the Bill seriously is to present a travesty of the truth: we were debating the subjects that matter.

The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) seems happy to leave matters to the other place, as long as he can get to bed early enough. I am not sure that that is what democracy is about. I was elected to debate, even if the hon. Gentleman was not, and I feel sorry for his constituents. He has never made any comment that suggested that he cared very much, and I fear that those constituents have a part-time Member.

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): There are several.

Mr. Martlew: That may be true, but I should be ruled out of order if I said anything else about that.

I was surprised at the way in which the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) admitted that the Government were wrong in 1974 when they reorganised local government. On Second Reading, I tackled the Secretary of State for the Environment about that and I asked him to apologise to the House for the mistakes made as a result of that reorganisation. The right hon. Gentleman merely attacked the Labour party and said that the Conservatives had nothing for which to apologise. However, three Conservative Back Benchers have got up today to admit that mistakes were made.

We want to ensure that such mistakes are not repeated with the next local government reorganisation, which represents an important change. I happen to believe that local government is as important to our democracy as the Chamber. We have a dual role, and the way in which hon. Members denigrate the work of county councils in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire is hard to take.

The local authorities were established by the Conservative Government and they have had to struggle

[Mr. Martlew]

with the system as best they can. I served on a county council, after its reorganisation, for 18 years and I have nothing but praise for its Conservative and Labour members for the way in which they struggled to tackle the problems with which they were faced. It was not their fault that the structure was wrong, and it does not become Members of this Chamber to criticise people who have merely attempted to do their best with a flawed system —a system introduced by a Conservative Government.

I am worried about the timetable motion because I understand that tomorrow will mark the end of the Committee stage. There are many important matters that still need to be discussed. I had hoped to move an amendment on annual elections—the Government seem to run away from elections. I had hoped that the Minister would say that the Government were in favour of annual elections to the new authorities.

Mr. Portillo *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Martlew: I must assume that the Government are not in favour of annual elections to local authorities.

I am not talking about a unitary authority. The district council in Carlisle has annual elections and on the fourth year the county council holds elections. Therefore within any four years of office there are annual elections as well as European elections and, perhaps, a general election. I am a great believer in democracy and I believe that annual elections keep local authorities on their toes. They ensure that the promises made at election time are kept. I have no doubt that the better authorities are those that are prepared to face their electorate every year.

When the Government introduced the poll tax, they argued that it would make local councils more accountable to their electorate. Therefore, I cannot understand why the Government will not give the electors of certain local authorities the opportunity to go to the polls annually.

I know that such elections are expensive for the political parties and I know that the Conservative party has money problems now because the captains of industry are not making a lot of money.

Mr. McCartney: It is true that the Conservative party is having problems with its fund-raising activities and that is why it has switched its attention to the far east and places such as Hong Kong for donations.

Mr. Martlew: My hon. Friend is right, but I should be ruled out of order were I to take up that issue. Unlike the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East, I would not seek to disagree with you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I accept that financial problems may be caused by having annual elections. I should like to discuss them with the Minister tomorrow, but I fear that that will not be possible. However, we have already had the Minister's answer to my proposal, so perhaps we shall not need to debate the matter tomorrow.

I am also worried that we may not have an opportunity to discuss historic cities. The hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French), who is no longer in his place, referred briefly to that subject. The problem is that we may not have time to debate the matter fully and I am looking for a positive response from the Minister. If we are to have unitary authorities—I do not advocate that—special attention must be paid to areas that have had a tradition for centuries of ruling themselves. They have often ruled themselves, having been cut off from central Government. Often, historic cities such as Carlisle were in a state of siege with no possibility of knowing what was being said in Westminster. On one famous occasion, Parliamentarians surrounded the city of Carlisle for many months and there was no option but for the city to govern itself. It even created its own coinage at that time. Carlisle is not unique, and those traditions were followed well before 1974. Many cities have proud traditions as county boroughs.

I hope that there will be time tomorrow to debate that subject. Indeed, I hope that it will not be necessary to debate the matter tomorrow. The Minister must be aware that time will be limited because of the Government's motion. If he is prepared tonight to say that the special place for historic cities should be recognised, it may not be necessary to debate the matter tomorrow. We shall then have an opportunity to debate other important parts of the Bill.

I understand that the Government are making a concession to continue the debate until midnight. Perhaps the Minister will turn into a pumpkin if we continue after midnight. Such a timetable is unsatisfactory. The Government want more but are not listening to elected representatives. As a Member of Parliament, I was sent here to scrutinise legislation and, as an Opposition Member, I am meant to oppose it. That is what democracy is about. It is my job to represent my constituents and scrutinise Government legislation. Because Opposition Members have been doing their job well, the Government can take it no longer. My hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) has obviously got under their skin and they are curtailing the debate, not because there is a problem with time but because they are not prepared to put up constructive arguments against our opposition to the Bill.

I hope that the motion will be defeated tonight, but I fear that it will not be. In that case, will the Minister responsible enter the debate tomorrow with a genuine desire to listen and accept the pertinent amendments? So far, the Minister has not accepted a single Opposition amendment—or even an amendment tabled by a Conservative Member. If we are to have a curtailed debate, I hope that it will be genuine on the Government's part and that they will accept the practical amendments. I hope that they will make some concessions on annual elections and historic cities.

9.13 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) has spoken bravely about his relish for sitting through the night, but his speech reminded me of the first part of those Shredded Wheat advertisements. He spoke bravely and beat his chest, saying that he wanted to stay to debate the matter, but when it was suggested that we might sit through the night, I have never heard such whingeing. As I said in an earlier intervention, some hon. Members did not even want to stay through the night——

Mr. Martlew: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the *Official Report*, he will see that at no time was I whingeing.

Mr. Hughes: I did not say that the hon. Gentleman was stupid. He did his whingeing outside the Committee, but we all heard it.

I shall be brief because other hon. Members wish to speak and I do not wish to exclude them from the debate. As I listened to the debate and sat through hour upon of repetitious Opposition speeches in Committee, it became clear that Labour had singled out the Bill as the one that they wanted to force the Government to drop if the Government opted for an early election.

Labour did not concentrate on the Bill for several reasons. First, it did not do so because of the Bill's effect on local government. Labour Members say that they welcome the opportunity of allowing local government to opt for a unitary structure. However, that does not fit their stated policy. The debate on clause 8 revealed everything. A raft of almost identical amendments was tabled and it was clear that Labour, which is primarily producer-driven, sought to reward its paymasters. That is what the amendments were all about.

Labour sees the prospect of forming a Government retreating with every day. But if a Labour Government were elected, they would stop compulsory competitive tendering and the producers, the people who demand money from the Labour party and who rely on it for their jobs, the unions, would simply carry on in their old way. There would be no improvements in services.

Mr. Allen McKay: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: I shall finish the point and then give way just once more.

Compulsory competitive tendering applies to the national health service as well as to local government, and in the NHS it saves £50 million a year. That is the cost of two local hospitals, but Labour would sweep that aside.

Mr. McKay: It appears that the hon. Gentleman is either misinformed, unintelligent or naive. I shall choose naive rather than either of the other two. In all the time that I have been here, I have known only one Bill that the Government wanted that failed to go through. That was a transport Bill. Any Government who want a Bill to become law can use the timetable. Therefore, there is no question of us filibustering to kill the Bill.

Mr. Hughes: In his last few weeks in Parliament, the hon. Gentleman has learnt a lot. I am grateful to him for accepting the logic of my argument. The Opposition could have talked the Bill out but we shall not give them the opportunity.

The second reason for Labour's opposition to the Bill is that it encompasses part of the citizens charter. Labour does not want its rotten local government record exposed in league tables. Labour is at the bottom of the tables for empty properties and for uncollected rents and rates, and the latest figures show that Labour authorities have failed to collect much of the community charge.

The third reason is that a Labour Government would want to emasculate the Audit Commission. The Labour party has made that clear. It does not want information to be published because it knows that that information will embarrass them. Without the Audit Commission, how would we have known that in seven months the direct service organisation in Liverpool has had 8,930 default notices for ground maintenance? Who would have discovered that seven Labour councils had not closed their books by the statutory deadline three years in a row, that Hackney's legal department had lamentable failures and that that council was owed £67 million in rent, rates and other debts? How would we have known that Lambeth operates in an ethos of crisis management rather than one of forward planning? That is what the Labour party wants to cover up; that is why it wants the Bill to fail. But the Bill will not fail; we will get it through with proper debate tomorrow and then on to the statute book, ready for it to help us to win the general election.

9.19 pm

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): I am sorry that I could not be here to hear the opening speeches, but I was sitting outside Balham station in a train with a broken rail in front of it. I apologise for that, and I will refrain from commenting on the lack of investment in the railways, because that subject is not on the agenda tonight.

What is on the agenda is the proper consideration of this Bill. The *Hansard* report of our Committee makes interesting reading. The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) spoke in tonight's debate, but in nine Committee sittings he managed to amass only one intervention. The Government want to guillotine this Bill, saying that there is not enough time to consider it in Committee, yet the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) made seven interventions in 20 minutes during the first 65 minutes of consideration of the Bill in Committee. It is contributions such as those which have led us to this.

The record shows that, on behalf of my party, I tabled a small number of amendments and spoke reasonably briefly to each of them. Those amendments dealt with important matters, yet now, as we move towards part II, we are to be denied the opportunity of sensibly advancing alternatives to the clauses in part II.

Three of the major issues in part I with which my amendments dealt were: facilities for local government to provide annual reports and tendering information in braille and on tape so that people with disabilities can read the record of their local authority; measures to allow local people to give their views on the standard of services delivered by companies that tender for services, before those companies are given a further contract; and a measure to turn compulsory competitive tendering into the more constructive voluntary approach which has worked well in many local authorities. All these and others were constructive ways of trying to improve the Bill in Committee. There was no hint on my part of trying to delay the Committee's proceedings.

I am worried because, as we approach part II, really the most important part of the Bill, we will not have the chance to look at it in the detail that is required. Why did the Government need to bring in the items in part I in the same Bill? Why were not the two matters kept separate, given that the second part of the Bill was so important? Part II commands some support in all parts of the House; it could have proceeded well and been improved in Committee. Part I seems to have been necessary only to implement the Government's policy of making everything compulsory.

We also need to provide our local communities with reassurance. Those of us who support unitary authorities —I include myself in this—do not intend to steamroller people into accepting structures with which they do not

[Mr. David Bellotti]

feel happy. Mistakes were made in the 1974 reorganisation, and we must not repeat them. People throughout the country need reassuring that they will not be reassigned to other local authority areas by someone sitting in Whitehall, and that they will not have someone arriving from London telling them what their natural community is.

It is important that from the work of the Local Government Commission should come a consensus with which people feel happy and under which they can enjoy their local services. The people in Polegate and Willingdon in my constituency are worried that they may be plonked in Eastbourne. They certainly should not be. People in such communities throughout the country want to remain with the authority with which they have been happy and which they feel is their natural community. The work of the Local Government Commission should enable them to stay where they feel happy, and I for one will do all I can to help them to do so.

Many people claim that providing an education service demands a particular size of authority, but that is just not true. Gillian Peele, fellow in politics at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, and Andrew Adonis, fellow in modern British government at Nuffield college, Oxford, have concluded after much research that few existing districts would finish up with fewer than 35 primary and five secondary schools. That would constitute a set-up that was viable to run education. The canard about size needs to be laid to rest.

Some services provided by county councils would give cause for concern if the authorities ended up small. I refer, for instance, to local archive services, which deserve a great deal of attention and which could be destroyed if very small authorities were made responsible for them. As for structure planning, in my county of East Sussex the basis of all planning has been that the strategic policy should divert growth to the south and east of our county, which in effect would protect the Sussex downs and the High Weald area of outstanding natural beauty. We must take on board the protection of those areas in any reorganisation of Sussex, as well as diverting economic planning for the future towards the areas where we want it to be. It is difficult to do that with single-tier local structures, yet that ought to be the way forward.

During our deliberations on part I, various local authorities and national bodies, including the Royal Institute of British Architects, drew to our attention what could be the result of not examining carefully what we are doing. The RIBA said:

> "If cost, not quality, becomes the criterion for choosing an architect, all that will happen is that we shall have a generation of slum buildings being built."

Many examples of that were drawn to our attention in Committee, to which we were able to give sufficient time.

The time spent so far has been adequate for part I. The time that we have now been given to consider part II is nowhere near adequate. It detracts enormously from the importance of part II. Therefore, I intend to oppose the guillotine motion, which is totally inappropriate and does nothing to serve our local communities.

9.25 pm

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): I am opposed in principle to all guillotine motions, but I feel very strongly about this Bill because many of my constituents are anxious to have a single-tier local authority. The reason is obvious. Few people understand the difference between the roles and responsibilities of district authorities and county councils. If the Bill were to die before the general election, the day of the return to unitary authorities would be delayed for several years. That would be a disaster.

Torbay used to have the status of a county borough. That was regarded as highly successful. The reality is that the county councils have done themselves out of a job. Following the Griffiths report, there is to be much greater provision of care in the community at a much lower level; responsibility for it is to be devolved downwards. County councils will therefore be out of a job. The same applies to education: to local management of schools and to schools that opt for grant-maintained status. That will reduce the burden on the county council.

As the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) said, there may be an argument for having a strategic authority for planning, perhaps for education and certainly for transport. That might be to the advantage of a county area, but there is no need to elect a strategic authority. If power is devolved down to the districts, I see no reason why, if the districts wish to have a strategic authority, they should not delegate members from the district to the county.

I am concerned about boundaries. My constituency does not cover the whole of the borough of Torbay. One particular ward does not form part of my parliamentary constituency; it forms part of the South Hams constituency. As an example of wasteful local government, this week the local authority conducted an absurdly expensive poll of the residents of Blatchcombe ward to determine whether they wished to remain in South Hams parliamentary constituency or to come within Torbay parliamentary constituency.

That was a fruitless exercise, when one considers that the Torbay parliamentary constituency is already too large. The chance of there being a change will not be increased by the poll. In my view, it was an absurd waste of public money. Curiously enough, though, if the people who live in that ward felt strongly enough about the issue, they would have every right to make representations to the Boundary Commission.

I am also concerned about some of the literature that was distributed in an apparently unbiased way to the people who live in that ward.

Mr. McCartney: This is parliamentary stuff.

Mr. Allason: It applies also to the local authority.

The literature that was sent to this particular group of voters, who are all members of a particular ward within the borough, relates specifically to the local authority. My worry is that we shall lose the opportunity to introduce a single tier of local government. In my experience, competitive tendering has been extremely useful and has saved much money. If the Bill were lost because of the general election, I fear that our constituents would be much worse off.

Unitary authorities are attractive to our constituents. I see no reason why any obstacles should be placed in the way of the Bill; it is important that it gets on to the statute

book. I understand that there is some contention about competitive tendering, but the crucial issue is in part II, which is why I urge the House to pass the timetable motion.

9.30 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) has asked me to apologise for his absence as he has an unavoidable commitment in his constituency. His absence does not, however, deflect me from congratulating him and my other hon. Friends who have served on the Committee on the excellent and constructive way in which they have approached the Bill.

For once, I think that there is a certain coherence about the Government's guillotine motion. The Government's lack of concern for the democratic process at Westminster in terms of proper debate of important legislation is matched by, and, indeed, entirely consistent with, their constant efforts to undermine democracy in local government. There is, in other words, a nice harmony—perhaps "nasty" is more accurate—between procedure and substance.

The Government, who have introduced a record number of guillotine motions, have shown fewer and fewer scruples about doing so as the number has mounted. We heard a truly pathetic speech from the Leader of the House, who made only the most perfunctory attempt to defend what he was doing. He made no real case for proposing the motion on the basis of delay and of proceeding with the Bill. Indeed, how could he, since the arguments were so weak? How could it be argued that 12 clauses of a Bill should not have been debated for 30 hours in Committee, when clause 8 is a clause of the greatest contention which caused so much upheavel in another place as to warrant the Government's tabling an amendment to restore the position?

It was scarcely possible for the Leader of the House to make that case, and he hardly tried. Instead, we have a shameless attempt to clear the decks for a possible general election. The Government's legislative programme is being prostituted to their election timetable. The irony is that the timetable now driving the Government is one that they dare not declare and probably will not even have the guts to adopt. The chances are that we shall have forfeited the prospects of a properly debated Bill for the sake of a general election date which the Government simply duck when faced with the challenge.

The truth is that the Government are still trembling in their tent, unwilling to take to the field of battle. The fact that they are now prepared to guillotine anything that moves shows only how far they now give absolute priority to saving their own skins rather than providing even a pretence of good government.

That instinctive lack of sympathy for and understanding of democracy in local government is matched by the substance of the Bill. It is called—ironically, one cannot help but think—the Local Government Bill, but it is more accurately described as the anti-local-government Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) pointed out, it comes at the end of a long catalogue of legislation in the past 13 years—perhaps nearly 60 Bills—designed to undermine the morale, constrain the competence, restrict the resources and destroy the independence of local government.

There is at least a certain "fearful symmetry"—to use Blake's phrase in a different context—in the fact that this bleak decade or more for local government was ushered in by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) who, perhaps wisely, cannot be present this evening—even he, perhaps, has a sense of shame—and is being brought to its overdue close by that self-same long-standing opponent of everything for which local government stands. The Bill reflects the same animus against local government which has marked both the right hon. Gentleman's stints at Marsham street and most of what has happened in between.

It is a period which saw the centralisation of power in Whitehall, the imposition of rate capping—first as a limited brake on so-called irresponsibility, but now as a universal assertion by Whitehall of its control over every local authority budget. It is a decade or more which saw the privatisation of local government services, the unfair rigging of the grant system and, above all, the imposition not only on local government but on the whole country of the great blight of the poll tax—a blight which continues still and will eventually prove the undoing of the Government.

The guillotining of the Bill in this undemocratic way takes its dishonourable place in a long history of crimes against local democracy. The whole thrust of the Bill is accusatory of local government. Local authorities are put, figuratively speaking, in the dock. Instead of trying to help local government to raise standards, as we propose through a quality commission which will establish and monitor proper standards, spread and encourage best practice and offer management help when needed, the Government are intent on publishing misleading league tables laying emphasis exclusively on cost, irrespective of the context and the level of service delivered.

If the Government are really interested in performance league tables, why do they not consider the issues that really matter—home helps, meals on wheels, library services and nursery provision? We know why they do not want to consider those aspects of local government: because those league tables would show the best performers to be Labour local authorities.

We are left with the inevitable suspicion that the Government consider the problems that they have created for local government merely as grist to their electoral mill. They have a vested interest in the difficulties that some local councils have faced. Rather than help with resources and management support, they prefer to leave those authorities to struggle with their problems so that they can be placed in the stocks and pelted with Heseltinian insults. Fortunately, the electorate are unimpressed by this pantomime.

The same approach can be seen in the Bill's treatment of compulsory competitive tendering. We have always suspected the motives behind CCT. We have always seen it not only as an attempt to undermine local government and to make way for profit-taking by the private sector, but as an attempt to drive down wages and working conditions in one of the least favoured parts of the labour market—all in the hope that by doing so they would drag down the wage structure throughout the economy.

The success of direct service organisations and direct labour organisations in winning perhaps more than 80 per cent. of the contracts put out to tender has been bought at a heavy price in terms of wages and working conditions —and all for very little gain. The only partial studies which

[Mr. Bryan Gould]

have so far been done suggest that the small improvement in costs which can be attributed to CCT has been outweighed by the increased administrative costs which have attended the process of tendering. In other words, there is literally no basis for concluding that CCT has been such a success that it should now be extended, as the Bill proposes, to a whole new range of services—to the white collar services, the professional, technical and financial services.

The Bill is an expression of ideological prejudice which is unsupported by any evidence. Indeed, the evidence is very much to the contrary. The evidence shows that there is so little prospect of the private sector in those areas being able to match the efficiency of in-house services that the Government have had to introduce a quality threshold which they have always maintained was simply inappropriate elsewhere. The motivation here is so obvious that it is blatant. The double envelope procedure that the Minister described in Committee will apply, as he concedes, only if one of the competitors is a DSO or a DLO.

The whole exercise came unstuck in another place, and it was not helped by the constitutional monstrosity of the Henry VIII clause in which the provision was drafted. True to form, the Government have refused to listen to local government, to independent experts and to their Lordships. The Bill is still disfigured by the same objectionable provisions, in terms both of substance and of constitutional propriety.

Part II, an important part containing 18 clauses and three schedules, potentially affects the whole structure of local government. Part II is of tremendous importance to the way in which we govern ourselves. Yet the Leader of the House has the cheek to tell us from the Dispatch Box that a day's debate is sufficient for it. The right hon. Gentleman is simply not serious and cannot be taken seriously.

It is welcome that the Government have recognised that the Tory reorganisation of 1974 simply has not worked. Local government is not accountable enough and it is far too complicated, so that people simply do not understand the system. We have never made any bones of the fact —indeed, we got there before the Tory party—that we want a unitary system, a simpler and more accountable system. We also agree that the right way to bring about that system is not to impose it from on high from Whitehall but to set up a Local Government Commission to undertake the task.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: I do not have time, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman understands.

We made it clear in advance of the Bill that we would support the Local Government Commission, not least because it will greatly simplify our task by enabling us to pick up its work in government and therefore to shorten the timetable for reform. However, we have also made it clear that our support was conditional on the Local Government Commission being set up properly, on its not being gerrymandered and on its having the right terms of reference, objectives and timetable. The Secretary of State has thrown away the chance of all-party consensus because he could not resist playing party politics—it is the predictable triumph of the party politician at the expense of the health of local government.

In part II, the Secretary of State has provided himself with what is in effect an instrument of party political warfare. He has created a commission which will trundle around the country under his direction, and which will line up its sights Labour-controlled county authorities so that they can be blasted to smithereens while leaving many Tory-controlled authorities intact. The whole process will lumber on for many years with partial reforms being instituted piecemeal and with dire consequences in terms of chaos and confusion for already hard-pressed local authorities, which will never know whether at any time they are meant to be unitary authorities or dual authorities and whether they are still threatened with or are now exempt from the prospect of reform.

The measure, and the guillotine needed to support it, are a fitting conclusion to a 13-year assault on local government by the Tory Government. We oppose the motion, as we have opposed every similar damaging attack on local democracy in the past 13 years. We may not have enough votes to ward off the assault today, but I am glad to say that the day is not far distant when we shall have the parliamentary votes to restore local government to its proper place in the government of this country.

9.44 pm

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): I genuinely regret the unavoidable absence this evening of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), because the guillotine motion and what lies behind it add up to a story of personal tragedy for the hon. Gentleman. Having played second fiddle, poor fellow, to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) on the Local Government Finance Bill Committee and having had to listen—as we all did—to very long speeches from the hon. Gentleman, the hon. Member for Brightside was at last given his own show —his own Bill to take through the House and through Committee. He wanted to address the issues seriously and, on the first two clauses, he did just that. We were having good debates and there was every prospect of our concluding our proceedings on the Bill in an orderly way and by agreement between the two sides.

Then something extraordinary happened. One morning progress ground to a halt. There had clearly been an intervention from on high—from a deus ex Dagenham. The hon. Member for Dagenham had clearly issued instructions that the Bill's progress was to be slowed down. We then saw a really very unhappy sight: the hon. Member for Brightside, wanting to do his job seriously and to address the issues, sat disconsolately on the Front Bench while one filibusterer after another on his Back Benches took the Floor and held forth at great length—presumably on the instructions of the hon. Member for Dagenham. What a collection they were—Rolls-Royce filibusterers filibustering at the very top of their pitch. My hon. Friends the Members for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) and for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) did well to pay tribute to filibustering of a very high order.

First into the field was the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), dogged in his filibustering, never letting a point go but pursuing it to the nth degree. Then came the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr.

McCartney). I give him top prize; the real trophy goes to him. A man who can speak effortlessly—certainly with repetition but almost without hesitation—for one hour 40 minutes is a grandee—top of his class.

The hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) was scarcely less able but could not quite produce that sort of filibuster all in one go. Having run out of steam in his first speech, he came back and made a second speech on the same amendment.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) is very good indeed—so long as one does not give him anything to read, because he finds reading a little tricky and stumbles over words. As long as he is extemporising, he is okay too.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) is not in the top flight of filibusterers but, given that he is the Whip, the fact that he intervened at all was proof indeed that a serious operation of delay was under way.

To be fair, that operation was balanced to some extent by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti), who compensated as we went along. There was one amendment that he was simply too miffed to move because he had not been told about the dinner break, and, on another occasion, because we went on rather late, he was not there to hear the winding-up speeches on one group of amendments or to move the next amendment. Fortunately, we saved a little on occasions when the hon. Member for Eastbourne might otherwise have intervened.

Imagine the frustration of the hon. Member for Brightside, particularly when—I plead guilty to this—I proposed that the Question be put on one amendment. After all the rubbish that we had heard, the hon. Member for Brightside, who had intended to give the serious reply from the Labour party, was cut off. The look of frustration on that man's face was deeply moving—in particular because his frustration and anger were not, I think, with the person who moved the closure but with someone else. I fully believe that the hon. Member for Brightside is unavoidably detained tonight. I do not believe for a moment that he simply will not share the Opposition Front Bench with the hon. Member for Dagenham.

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said that we should avoid ineffectual legislation, but one does not avoid such legislation with ineffectual filibustering. If Labour had been serious, the speeches of the hon. Member for Makerfield would have been trimmed, the hon. Member for Carlisle would have been restricted to a single speech and the hon. Member for Brightside would have been allowed to have his say—but no, he was squeezed out of the debate.

Concern has been expressed that there will not be time under the terms of the timetable motion to consider the remaining clauses. We have 10 hours in Committee to consider part II. That is the same amount of time that the other place spent on those matters. The hon. Member for Copeland said that what happened in the other place should not influence what we should do here. I do not know about that. Their Lordships usually take a very responsible and minute interest in constitutional issues. If part II, which is about a constitutional matter—the reform of the structure of local government—could be considered in another place in 10 hours, I see no reason why we should not consider it here in 10 hours, provided that we can agree between us a sensible allocation of time for the various amendments.

There are no amendments to most of the clauses that we have to discuss. Most of the clauses will be discussed, if at all, only in clause stand part debates. The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) put his foot in it when he said that part I was the contentious part. He said that part II was not contentious; therefore, it can be considered quite happily in the 10 hours allocated under the timetable motion.

Mr. Allen McKay: The Minister referred to 10 hours of debate. There will not be 10 hours; there will be eight and a half hours of debate. The rest of the time will be taken up with dinner breaks and the like—unless we cut that out.

I believe that part I is the contentious part. The contentious aspects of part II are who will comprise the commission and what will be its terms of reference. It would have been better to introduce two Bills—one in which we could debate competitive tendering and one in which we could debate the commission.

Mr. Portillo: I am not sure whether the hon. Member for Brightside, who has already had to deal with two Bills, would agree that we should have had three Bills on local government. However, I take the point made by the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone.

Why was part I contentious? Why was it filibustered? Why was it necessary to talk that part of the Bill out? The answer is that is contained the citizens charter, which sets out to measure local authority performance objectively. The Labour party has told us that the citizens charter is ineffective and that Labour is not bothered about it. Why should the National Association of Local Government Officers spend £2 million of union money opposing the citizens charter? Why does its advertising show a lady burning a copy of the citizens charter in her grate if the charter is not something that bothers the Labour party intensely? It was necessary for Labour to talk out the part of the Bill that related to the citizens charter because Labour is aware that it spells electoral peril for that party.

Part I also contained provisions enabling the Audit Commission to measure local authority output. The hon. Member for Brightside once fell foul of the Audit Commission when he was the leader of the Sheffield council. Since then, he has made a series of macho statements that he would sweep away the Audit Commission and that its days were numbered. In the fulness of time, those phrases had to be modified and it is now said only that the Audit Commission will be subsumed. "Subsumed" is a sinister socialist verb which means, broadly speaking, that its days are numbered and that it will be swept away. In its place there will be something less rigorous upon local authorities; their measurements will be self-determined.

Mr. Gould: The Minister and some of his colleagues have repeated that canard so frequently that it is time at least to educate them if they are too ignorant to do their work properly. What we propose for the Audit Commission is that not a single part of its functions should be lost. Those functions should be incorporated in the wider functions of the quality commission which will carry out all the current functions of the Audit Commission but will also add to its range of responsibilities a responsibility to raise the quality of services delivered by local government.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman, who has shown what an iron fist he has, will doubtless discipline the hon. Member for Brightside for using phrases such as "sweeping away the Audit Commission" or "its days are numbered", which the hon. Gentleman must agree are at the very least bound to give a misleading impression of the Labour party's apparently benign intentions towards the Audit Commission.

Why else has the Bill had to be filibustered? It has had to be filibustered because Opposition Members have a tremendous dislike of compulsory competitive tendering and must do all in their power to oppose it. Mr. Jack Dromey of the Transport and General Workers Union said:

"The Council must include as many hurdles as it can in the tender specifications it sends to private contractors. It must try every possible way to prevent services being taken over by private firms."

We know from the advertising campaign that is presently going on that the National Association of Local Government Officers is against compulsory competitive tendering. That is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) made.

The union brothers' support now for the Labour party is conditional upon the brothers' policies being put into effect if the Labour party is elected to Government. That is why, with a click of the fingers, what the unions want in compulsory competitive tendering becomes the Labour party's policy on compulsory competitive tendering. That is why some of the slowest debates that we had in Committee were on the subject of compulsory competitive tendering.

The Labour party's main hope in filibustering the Bill was that we should not get on to part II, which so concerns my hon. Friends the Members for Gloucester (Mr. French) and for Nottingham, South, who are keen to get on with debating the issues. Part II places tremendous emphasis on local communities, whereas the Labour party wishes a prescription from Whitehall to be introduced overnight so that there is no local discretion about the form of local government—it will all be decided by the Government in Whitehall.

Of course, the Labour party wants to establish regions with tax-raising powers. I say that it wants to establish regions with tax-raising powers—tax is certainly what the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) said. He was quoted in the *Municipal Journal* of 21 February. The hon. Member for Dagenham, recently on the Brian Walden programme, said:

"no one is talking about tax-raising powers . . . for these regional assemblies."

"No one" may be the description that the hon. Gentleman wishes to give the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, but I am bound to remind him that "no one" is unfortunately somebody in today's Labour party.

The hon. Member for Dagenham appears to be very confused about whether we will have one tier or two tiers under Labour. On the Brian Walden programme, he said:

"local government needs to be simplified so that it is simply one tier. So our regional proposals while they don't depend on that, I think that is nevertheless the answer to your question about yet another tier, there won't be another tier."

So there are to be regions, but there is apparently not to be another tier.

The Labour party is against the citizens charter. Its acolytes in NALGO and in the National Union of Public Employees have determined that there should be no compulsory competitive tendering, and that is now the policy of the Labour party, so the Bill has been filibustered. The Labour part is against compulsory competitive tendering because the brothers want to be sure that their members can have the jobs no matter what the cost to the customer. Therefore, the Bill has been filibustered.

The Labour party is against reform of local government structure because it wishes to impose new regions on the people of Britain, who do not want them. We will not allow the Bill to be lost for those reasons. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 292, Noes 203.

Division No. 84] **[8.59 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'l's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*

Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'caster)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John

Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Robert N. Wareing.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Local Government Bill [*Lords*]:—

Committee

1.—(1) The Standing Committee to which the Bill has been allocated shall report the Bill to the House on 18th February.

(2) Proceedings on the Bill at a sitting of the Standing Committee on that day may continue until Midnight whether or not the House is adjourned before that time, and if the House is adjourned before those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion the Standing Committee shall report the Bill to the House on 19th February.

Report and Third Reading

2. The proceedings on consideration and Third Reading of the Bill shall be completed in one allotted day and shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

3.—(1) No Motion shall be made in the Standing Committee relating to the sitting of the Committee except by a member of the Government, and the Chairman shall permit a brief explanatory statement from the Member who moves, and from a Member who opposes, the Motion, and shall then put the Question thereon.

(2) On the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill in the Standing Committee the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question.

Order of proceedings

4. No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which proceedings in the Standing Committee or on consideration of the Bill are taken, except by a member of the Government, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Dilatory motions

5. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings on the Bill shall be made in the Standing Committee or on an allotted day except by a member of the Government, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Extra time

6. If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) stands over from an earlier day, paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Private business

7. Any private business which has been set down for consideration at Seven o'clock on an allotted day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business for a period of three hours from the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill or, if those proceedings are concluded before Ten o'clock, for a period equal to the time elapsing between Seven o'clock and the conclusion of those proceedings.

Conclusion of proceedings

8.—(1) For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings on the Bill which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;
(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time; the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill);
(c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper in the name of any Member, if that amendment is moved or Motion is made by a member of the Government; and
(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(3) If the allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which under this Order are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Supplemental orders

9.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to those proceedings.

(2) If on the allotted day the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before Ten o'clock, no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Saving

12. Nothing in this Order shall—

(a) prevent any proceedings to which the Order applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by the Order; or
(b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with on any day after the completion of all such proceedings on the Bill as are to be taken on that day.

Recommittal

11.—(1) References in this Order to proceedings on consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings at those stages respectively, for, on or in consequence of, recommittal.

(2) On the allotted day no debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or

otherwise), and Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Business Committee and Business Sub-Committee

12. Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) and Standing Order No. 103 (Business sub-committees) shall not apply to this Order.

Interpretation

13. In this Order—

"allotted day" means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the day, provided that a Motion for allotting time to the proceedings on the Bill to be taken on that day either has been agreed on a previous day, or is set down for consideration on that day;

"the Bill" means the Local Government Bill [*Lords*].

Association Agreements

10.14 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The motion on the Order Paper begins:

"That this House takes note of the proposals described in the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum".

The middle of the motion refers to welcoming

"the principle of Association Agreements between the European Community and the reforming democracies of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia"

and it concludes by saying that the House

"looks forward to early ratification of the Agreements".

The House has been asked in this debate of a maximum of an hour and a half to consider the association agreements. They are substantial, lengthy documents, which are important to this House, the country and the European Community. The Foreign Office supplied six copies of the documents to the House for the use of hon. Members. I was able, late this evening, to obtain the final copy of those documents. It is not satisfactory for the House to consider such an important issue and to refer to documents at short notice when there are not sufficient copies of them for the hon. Members who need to refer to them, especially during the debate.

The unnumbered explanatory memorandum and the draft interim agreement on the association agreements should also be available, but they were made available from the Vote Office only at 4.30 pm last Thursday. The documents could not be released—not even the report of the Select Committee on European Legislation—until after the business statement had been made. Hon. Members are being asked to debate matters of crucial importance to our constituents on a Monday evening without having had the opportunity to get hold of the documents until late last Thursday evening.

The motion asks the House to look forward

"to early ratification of the Agreements."

Am I right in presuming that ratification happens automatically and that this hour-and-a-half debate will be our only opportunity to ratify those important agreements before they come into effect at the end of 1992?

Mr. Speaker: The Minister might like to answer those points. I take note of the hon. Member's remarks. The unnumbered explanatory memorandum, by long-standing practice, stands proxy for the House to consider such proposals in a fast-moving situation.

Of the other bulky documents, I understand that only six copies were available, so perhaps the Minister would like to explain.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hope that I can help the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and the House.

The association agreements, of course, require a separate ratification debate in the House under section 1(3) of the European Communities Act 1972. On the documents that were made available last Friday, the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, will confirm that the Committee had sight of those working documents early in December. The latest versions of the documents were deposited in the House on Friday. They are working documents, as stated in the motion.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We should get on with the motion now.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Some of us spend much time discussing matters with our colleagues from the various eastern European countries and the debate is important to us. We were unable to receive or see those documents before we left the House last weekend. You will appreciate that weekends are very busy for many hon. Members. It is irresponsible and unreasonable for the House to be expected to debate documents which we have not had an opportunity to see.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot say much more about the matter. I understand that the documents were available on Thursday afternoon, which would have enabled Members to get hold of them before the weekend.

Mr. Robertson: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The documents were specifically held back. As you well know from your background, we have a good knowledge of what the business might be for the following week before Thursday at 3.30 pm. Indeed, Opposition spokesmen are nominated to answer debates and Government spokesmen are put up before that. As the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, I requested a copy of those documents on Thursday and I was told that I could not have them because they could not be released from the Select Committee of the House to me until the Leader of the House had spoken at 3.30 pm.

I realise that such matters are catching you off guard, Mr. Speaker. They are being raised in this way because I found out about them only earlier this evening. The Minister's answer did not cover the association agreements. They are mentioned in the motion to be put forward by the Government this evening. Only six copies were available and hon. Members therefore had no opportunity to study them before this important debate.

Mr. Speaker: This is an hour and a half's debate and the House does not want to be kept up all night listening to points of order. I am not responsible for when documents are placed in the Vote Office, but I do not disagree with what the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) has said. It is unsatisfactory if hon. Members do not have an opportunity to study documents that we are about to discuss, because it leads to inadequate debate.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the complexity of the documents involved, rather than allowing Parliament to continue without adequate information, would it not be better to suspend the House for 10 minutes to allow the usual channels to arrange a different time to ensure that hon. Members have an adequate opportunity to consult the documents? Surely that would be fair.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot do that. The explanatory memorandum was available.

10.23 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the proposals described in the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 29th November 1991, relating to Association Agreements between the Community and its Member States and Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and European Community Document No. 10561/91, relating to interim agreements between the Community and Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia; welcomes the principle of Association Agreements between the European Community and the reforming democracies of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia; recognises that these Agreements will offer them substantial benefits by encouraging trade with the Community, enhancing political co-operation, and strengthening links with the European Community to which these countries have expressed a wish to accede; and looks forward to early ratification of the Agreements.

The three association agreements—one each with Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland—are mixed agreements. There are elements which fall under Community competence and others that are intergovernmental. We hope that the main agreements will come fully into force before the end of the year. Those main agreements to which the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) referred will require a separate ratification debate in the House under section 1(3) of the European Communities Act 1972. The whole process of ratification in all 12 Member States is likely to take some months.

For that reason, and to avoid delay, the Community has decided to bring forward the implementation of those elements—mostly trade liberalisation measures—which fall entirely under Community competence. They are to be formally adopted on 25 February for imlementation on 1 March.

We are scrutinising both main and interim sets of agreements this evening. The Select Committee on European Legislation has rightly identified these agreements as politically important and worthy of debate. The House will be notified in due course of the Government's plans for ratification of the main agreements under section 1(3). A proper debate on that matter will take place in the House.

Help for central and eastern Europe falls under five broad headings. The association agreements are tailored to dovetail into existing help in all five areas. To be effective and to give the sort of substantial help that we wish to give, the association agreements must open the Community's markets to goods from Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland. The first and perhaps the most important element is trade liberalisation.

The agreements allow for the asymmetric lowering of trade barriers. The EC has agreed to reduce its barriers to imports more quickly than Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland reduce theirs. That is only right. The EC is a very large market. If the associate countries are to restructure their economies successfully, it will be vital for them to have full access to the EC's markets as quickly as possible.

The agreements also provide for a substantial measure of trade liberalisation in agriculture because agriculture is the area in which the three countries are most likely to become competitive. After only three years, import charges on their agricultural exports to the EC will be reduced to 40 per cent. of the present level, and the volume of their exports eligible for those preferential terms will grow by 50 per cent. over five years. Further progress towards free trade in agriculture will be made during the second five-year period of the agreements.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Has an assessment of any sort been made of the likely increase in CAP expenditure and in surpluses as a consequence of this superb trade rationalisation? Does not the Minister think

that it would be sensible to make some move towards reducing the cost of the CAP before inviting a further flood of trade which will simply add to the mountains of surpluses and to the cost of the CAP?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I am sure that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), who will be winding up the debate on behalf of the Ministry, will wish to answer my hon. Friend's detailed points. I am glad and not at all surprised that my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) welcomes agreements on agricultural free trade. One of the advantages of the agreements is that they will be beneficial to consumers in this country.

Sir Teddy Taylor: How will they help consumers? The Minister has made a specific statement that consumers will be helped. They are suffering hugely at present. If the expenditure and the mountains increase, how will the consumer be helped in any way? Will the Minister please tell us?

Mr. Garel-Jones: The consumer will be helped by the increased competition that the arrival of high-quality food at low prices from eastern European countries will bring to our markets.

Mr. Hardy: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I should like to make some more progress and then I shall give way.

Secondly, there is economic co-operation. That covers a wide range of sectors from industry and investment protection to energy, education and the environment. The aim is to help the three associate countries to build up the political and economic structures of a modern state, to compile reliable statistics and to enable them to help small and medium-sized companies and to counter the activities of money launderers.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On education and the environment, may I ask the question of which I gave the Foreign and Commonwealth Office notice—can anything be done to prevent the sale across frontiers of the beautiful wooden carvings that the all-party heritage group saw throughout northern Bohemia? Churches in remote areas are being robbed and vandalised. Would it not be ironic if with the end of communism there were an absolute collapse of any protection for Czechoslovak art? That is happening as a result of western European greed.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to express concern about that. He has already written to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about it. As he knows, these matters are ultimately for the police in Czechoslovakia, but he will be pleased to learn that some of the assistance that we are giving that country, through the know-how fund, is aimed at helping the police force there to pursue criminals of this sort. I certainly share the hon. Gentleman's concern.

Mr. Hardy: Will the Minister take note of the fact that, at various meetings in those countries, one of which I recall attending in the Budapest Parliament, members of his party—I exclude the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg), who has played a distinguished role in all this—repeatedly and vigorously urged these countries to sweep away all regulations and to leave their countries free for entrepreneurs from western Europe, who would then help them? Because such regulations were swept away, this sort of scandal is bound to occur, and is bound to be repeated, until more sensible advice comes from western Europe.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I recognise that there is a certain nostalgia among Labour Members for at least some of the repressions and controls that used to be exercised on the other side of the iron curtain. The hon. Gentleman knows better than to try to attribute the rise in crime in some of those countries to the freedoms and liberal market economies being built up in them. That will not wash. The hon. Gentleman and many of his hon. Friends still find the idea of a free market offensive, but that is the very concept that these associations agreements are designed to bolster.

The third aspect deals with approximation of laws. In anticipation of successful applications for Community membership the three will take steps to bring basic commercial and financial legislation into line with Community legislation. That will be working with the grain, because market forces will encourage them to base their laws on Community texts. We are ready to help with the drafting of laws, under our programme of technical assistance, when we are asked to do so. British advisers are already at the centre of the privatisation programmes in Czechoslavakia, Hungary and Poland.

Fourthly, I refer to the political dimension. The growing political dialogue with these three countries is not an EC monopoly. The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, the North Atlantic Co-operation Council and the Council of Europe, whose president, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) I see in his place, are all closely involved too. But the EC is the club to which the central and east Europeans most want to belong. To help that long-term ambition, to prepare the way and to give a foretaste of what membership involves, the association agreements will set up association councils which will meet once a year at ministerial level to review and build on the agreements.

A committee of officials will assist the council. There will be a political dialogue with the Twelve's machinery for foreign policy co-operation. Already these countries are being influenced by decisions taken by the Twelve.

Fifthly, I must deal with financial arrangements. The agreements do not directly cover financial help, but the record of Community members is good. The Community set up the special PHARE programme of technical assistance, initially for Poland and Hungary but now covering all of eastern Europe. So far, the Community has committed £877 million to these programmes. The agreements promise to continue technical assistance beyond the end of this year.

For these three countries, association agreements bring to an end that chapter of European history which began with the collapse of the Berlin wall. That collapse demonstrated that command economies of the kind favoured by socialists do not work and that the more extreme attempts to make socialism work through communist dictatorship resulted in the cruel and immoral denial of human rights. Secondly, it gave the lie to the fashionable internationalism of the last 40 years that sought to deny that patriotism and the sense of belonging to a nation could—indeed, should—be subsumed under some sort of all-enveloping socialist morality. In the end,

[Mr. Garel-Jones]

it was that sense of belonging that gave Poles, Czechoslovaks and Hungarians the courage to come out into the streets against communism.

Those of us in the west who have consistently advocated free market economies underpinned by democracy—*[Interruption.]* I recognise that the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) is not one of them—therefore had a moral duty to move to support these new democracies. That is why it was the British Government who first proposed association agreements in the European Council in Strasbourg in December 1989, and that is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister moved to speed up the negotiations last summer.

These agreements begin to substantiate the euphoria with which we all greeted the arrival of Poland, Czechosolvakia and Hungary into the family of democratic nations. They provide the tools for consolidating democracy and creating a liberal market-oriented economy. *[Interruption.]* I recognise that the hon. Member for West Derby does not like that sort of economy, but that is the kind of economy we seek, however painful it may be to the hon. Gentleman to hear that.

Britain's leadership in this area, in setting up the association agreements in the first place and pushing for them within the Community, is widely recognised and much appreciated in those countries. We now have to build on the agreements and make them work. We hope to be able to hold the first association councils during our presidency and we hope that the agreements that in the their preamble

"recognise that Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia's ultimate objective is to accede to the Community"

will indeed help them to achieve that objective. In that spirit, I commend the motion to the House.

10.36 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I hesitate to return to the point of order which was made before the debate started, but it is essential to drive, home to the Minister that the way in which we deal with European Community business is wrong and inefficient and should not be tolerated. The Minister underlined the importance of the subject throughout his speech. The way in which the House has been treated is therefore a classic illustration of how the House should not deal with business of such importance.

It is not appropriate that we should receive copies of the documents late on a Thursday afternoon when they are to be debated in the House of Commons on the following Monday. It is intolerable that documents of such consequence as the association agreements, which were signed by the Government on 16 December 1991, are still unavailable to the House of Commons in the middle of February 1992.

It should come as no surprise to the Minister that the Opposition welcome the agreements between the European Community and Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, from what we have been able to read of them up to now. We believe that it is in the interests of those countries and of Europe as a whole that full European Community membership should be seen as the aim of the exercise. We therefore warmly applaud the inclusion in the preamble of the words

"bearing in mind the ultimate objective of the three countries is to become full Community members . . . this agreement will help to reach this."

We believe that the political stability of the central European new democracies will be secured only by, first, the achievement of economic strength and, secondly, the adaptation of their political, legal and social institutions to the standards that we take for granted in the west of the continent.

These association agreements, or European agreements as they are now called, have to be seen as a first step by us in the still wealthy and politically secure and stable west of the continent to enrol our central European partners in our far from exclusive club. We shall have to go well beyond the measures in the agreements to ensure that full membership is attainable and possible. Much can be done to make that happen, but much still needs to be done.

I should like to share with the House my feelings of last weekend. On Saturday afternoon, I walked for about a mile with my daughter, Rachael, who is 11. There was nothing particularly spectacular or remarkable in that, even for a politician seven weeks away from a general election, but our walk was slightly out of the ordinary. We walked from the Reichstag in Berlin, the future home of the Parliament of the unified Germany, through the Brandenburg gate up the Unter den Linden to the Volkskammer, the defunct Parliament of the now defunct German Democratic Republic.

In a hastily written peroration, the Minister referred to the Berlin wall and its demolition in 1969. I first saw the Berlin wall in 1981 when I visited the city with Brynmor John and other members of Labour's defence team. I could not disguise my revulsion and shock at what the wall looked like and what it represented—a lethal concrete partition down the centre of Europe. It was a division not only between east and west Berlin but between two systems —one corrupt and venal, prostituting the word "socialism" and denying real and vital freedoms, and the other system, which perhaps is imperfect and fickle but which allows its citizens a choice of opinions, goods and futures. We shall exercise that choice in only a few weeks, time.

Like so many other hon. Members, I saw the wall and checkpoint Charlie again and again over the years, and it never ceased to be an obscenity. In 1983, I asked Richard von Weizsacker, then governing mayor of west Berlin and now the first president of the united Germany, whether he thought that I would be able to walk through the Brandenburg gate with my daughter in the year 2001, when she will attain the age of 21. He and I, and I am sure every other Member of the House, thought that that was an impossible dream, but last Saturday my daughter and I did what so many have done since that famous night on 22 December 1989 when the most famous closed road in Europe was opened. It was a moving moment that I will never forget.

I drew two lessons from that walk. First, if we in the west had been able calmly and rationally to choose whether to admit the citizens who lived beyond the Brandenburg gate into the European Community, would we have done so so quickly? Given the basket-case nature of the economy of the German Democratic Republic, would not it have been put a long way down the queue for

membership of the Community? The reality is that we had no choice. The GDR united with the Federal Republic of Germany, and had it not done so its citizens would have decamped into the territory of West Germany. Like it or not, they are now full members of the European Community, and the Community has not trembled as a consequence.

The second lesson of our collective sweet relief that the 28-year-old Berlin wall had come down was that we dare not rest on our celebrations. There is a danger—a real and live danger—that one wall will come down and another one, an economic wall, will go up between the club members and failed applicants, between the rich west and the poor unstable countries in the east and between those who enjoy the taste of freedom of movement and those who will be told that we have no room for them and 'will they kindly keep out.' Speaking personally but with some passion, I hope, having experienced that liberating feeling last Saturday in Berlin, I have no intention of letting my daughter grow up in a world in which she will have to fight to get the gates—new economic gates as they may well be—open once again in 20 years' time. In the short term——

Sir Teddy Taylor: Will the hon. Gentleman explain this liberalisation for the people of eastern Europe? According to my reading of the agreements, they state that freer trade and the ability to increase our food mountains depend on those countries first agreeing to the progressive harmonisation of their laws with ours. How does it create liberality in Europe if they have to adopt EC laws so that they can dump their food and add to our dumping?

Mr. Robertson: I shall let the hon. Gentleman continue his private war with members of his Front Bench because he finds that much more enjoyable, and so do they.

Inevitably, we and the people of eastern Europe want to see a harmonisation of their laws with those of the European Community. They are not obliged to do that, but that harmonisation is their target, their wish and their desire. They are willing to work towards that target which they believe will build a strong democracy for them in the future. Perhaps at some distant point in that future—and especially under a Labour Government—some sanity will be brought to the common agricultural policy. We are committed to that, and it is something that the Conservatives have signally failed to achieve in the past 13 years.

In the short term, it is not our aid or our technical assistance that will make the difference to the economic convergence, although it will have a major role to play but trade between west and east. That is the real importance of the European agreements. They will start the process of allowing the central European states to build export markets. Only by selling their goods will they provide jobs and guarantee prosperity for their people. If we close off markets, we risk their economic experiments and our own security. If this fails, we can confidently——

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: No, I shall not. There is a shortage of time. Oh, I shall give way briefly.

Mr. Oppenheim: If time is that short, perhaps the hon. Gentleman should have spent less of it talking about his nice stroll through Berlin.

He rightly said that it was crucial for eastern Europe that we open our markets to it, but surely if he reads the documents he will find that we are not opening up our markets to eastern Europe—we are keeping them closed for a further five to 10 years. At the very time when those countries are desperately struggling to convert their economies to market economies, we are not practising what we preach, because we are keeping our markets closed to their goods.

Mr. Robertson: These are minimum periods. Yes, perhaps they are too conservative. Perhaps the Government whom the hon. Gentleman supports at the moment took too conservative a view, but these agreements for progressive liberalisation of the markets were reached by both sides. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should concentrate his attention on the members of the Government Front Bench rather than on me.

There is a serious danger that if we fail, especially on the issue of trade, we can confidently expect the pressures of immigration to intensify. To expect the possibility of a return to a new and perhaps even more ruthless authoritarianism is certainly not scaremongering.

The director of research for the general agreement on tariffs and trade, Mr. Richard Blackhurst, recently calculated the threat from central and eastern European trade. He pointed out—these are interesting statistics—that in 1988 Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary had a combined share of world trade below that of Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan back in 1970. Since 1970, the Asian four tigers, as they are called, quadrupled their share of world trade, yet it has not had a dramatic impact on western Europe.

To be more specific, in western Europe in 1988, only 1·3 per cent. of all manufactured imports came from the countries of eastern Europe—hardly a real danger to our economic survival. Britain's trade with central Europe lags well behind that of Germany, France and Italy. Those countries see a long-term potential in the new markets in eastern Europe, whereas in Britain a combination of short-term conservative business attitudes and a privatised Export Credits Guarantee Department means that yet again we shall lose.

Aid and assistance is vital if we are all to benefit from the experiment in central Europe. Much has to be done. Fair enough, four fifths of all foreign aid committed to eastern and central Europe has come through the European Community and the PHARE programme has done much, but alongside help from the Group of 24 and the Group of Seven there has been tied aid and guarantees which have not been taken up. Our belated bilateral programme, good as it is in quality and excellent as it is in delivery, is nothing like enough to make a lasting impression.

Next year, our know-how funds for all five countries in central and eastern Europe—I pay tribute to the success of the funds—will amount to the grand total of £30 million. That is the sum to be spent in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania. That is a ludicrously miserable sum when our exports of banking, accounting, management and English language training skills are so popular and so much in demand and there is such a valuable pay-back in the long term.

Mr. Garel-Jones: By how much would Labour propose to increase the know-how fund? Has the hon. Gentleman had clearance from the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer?

Mr. Robertson: We have already made the commitment that there will be an increase in the know-how funds. The precise amount cannot be stated now. The Foreign Office is in no position to give guarantees. We are told that miserable sums will have a deep and lasting impact, yet the Government are not in a position to say how much more will be spent. Outstanding work is being undertaken by the British Council, by our embassy personnel, by organisations such as Voluntary Service Overseas and by other countries, and it should be backed by real money. The United Kingdom could give that money and the countries that we are discussing could use it.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: No, I shall not give way. I am conscious of the limited time that is available for the debate.

Britain is one of the few countries in the European Community still to insist on a rigorous and highly unpopular visa requirement for Poles coming to this country. Can the Minister justify that policy, bearing in mind the fact that Britain stands alone? What will happen to the policy when the agreements take effect?

In the words of the chief negotiator of the Commission, Mr. Pablo Benarides, the agreements are not "an entrance ticket" to the EC. He referred to them as a "kind of trial run". We see them as the start of a process that involves genuine political will to make these countries become members, to help them with the convergence that will be necessary and to ensure that economic and political barriers have no more place in the Europe of tomorrow than they have at present in the heart of Britain.

10.54 pm

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): I should like to raise the sights of the House somewhat. The motion mentions the fact that the three nations in question wish to accede to the Community. To do that, they must satisfy a major test, which is to be quite certain that their laws on human rights and elections meet the high standards of the Council of Europe, which has now been recognised by the European Community as the bridge over which the nations can cross to it in the years ahead.

We had to find a way of bringing the nations into association with us. That we did by offering them guest membership of the Council, which gave them the opportunity to participate in our democratic debates, to take part in our committees and to see—after four decades and more—how a democracy worked. I had the great privilege of formulating the rules under which the countries were able to enter the Council of Europe. I did so with the assistance of the hon. Member for Wakefield who, in other circumstances, is my hon. Friend——

Mr. Hardy: Wentworth.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: Yes, Wentworth, where there is that ghastly American mess of chemicals which should never have been there.

Between us, the hon. Gentleman and I managed to formulate the arrangements. That has resulted in the full membership of Poland, the Czechoslovak Federal Republic and Hungary, which is far more important than the quibbling over detail that I have heard at least twice tonight.

We must look much wider. I received Lech Walesa in my office in Strasbourg last week—we had about 40 minutes' worth of conversation together—and the major problem that he put to me—*[Interruption.]* Will my right hon. Friend the Minister allow me? Lech Walesa said that the major problem was that, although the west had paid enormous tributes to Poland for being a pioneer in breaking free, the words had not been matched by deeds, and he was having immense problems in finding a way of converting the Polish economy to the sort of methods that were needed to turn Poland round.

I had also met him four months earlier, when I led the election observer team. On that occasion, the worry was whether Poland would produce a Government that could command a majority in the Sejm. They could not command a majority, and democracy was multi-party.

We now have the opportunity to show the three nations in question that the west is willing to find a way of encouraging their trade. Mr. Walesa told me, "You have been very generous in exporting your goods to our countries so that we spend our money on buying imported goods. We wish that you would give us an opportunity to produce more goods in our country that you would buy." That is what is needed, and I believe that the proposals in the document are a first step.

There is a very real danger that, before too long, if things do not work out properly, we may have a Czech republic and a Slovak republic and there will no longer be a federal republic of the two. That would be a tragedy. If the citizens of the countries can see that democracy pays them dividends—if they have goods to buy at prices that they can afford—we stand a chance of success. If we do not show them that, there is a real risk—as the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and my right hon. Friend the Minister said—that the democracies will fail. If they do fail, we in the west will have to take much of the blame for being too protectionist, too little Englander and too unwilling to live up to the reputation that we ought to have —that we aid democracy.

10.58 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) referred to me a moment ago. It is only right that the House should be aware of the considerable contribution that he has made over the past two or three years—not least in being very active in the Council of Europe in Strasbourg during a period of change.

I am very worried indeed about the likely consequence to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Only a week or so ago in Strasbourg, I asked the Chairman of the Council of Ministers whether he was fully aware that, two or three years ago, we were talking about a Europe of 15, and within the next 18 months there is likely to be a Europe of 45.

As Europe has widened, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland have become full members of the Council of Europe, which, as the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate said, is a staging post to full membership of the Community of Europe. However, if a mess is made of the development of those three states, the rest of the emerging republics of eastern Europe will face a colossal crisis.

Although I am not critical of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate, I am perhaps critical of all other Conservative Members. I believe that Britain and the rest of the Community have made mistake after mistake. It is all very well to say, "Open your countries to democracy and trade." About 18 months ago, I attended an important debate in the Hungarian Parliament, in which advice was offered by people from the right of European and British politics—and perhaps one or two Conservative Members, such as the hon. Members for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) and for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone), who play such distinguished roles there and who devote a great deal of time to the Council of Europe, were present; I cannot remember.

However, the Polish Prime Minister and the Polish Foreign Secretary and the Czech Prime Minister and Czech Chancellor of the Exchequer were also present. They were advised to copy the philosophy that has dominated our Government: they were told to privatise. They were even given the specific example of the need to sell off their council houses so that the capital receipts would, as in Britain, stimulate their building industries. I had to point out that those capital receipts in Britain were largely frozen, and that that advantage did not apply here.

That may be a petty example, but the fact remains that we have told them that we can offer them a great deal, but they have gained remarkably little advantage. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate said that Lech Walesa had told him that we must deliver what we appear to have promised. We are not doing that. Poland is likely to face a greater economic crisis than it faced before.

The Minister seems to be making the mistake of assuming that Europe will open its doors to agricultural exports. We might; the Danes might and the Dutch might. Even the Germans might. However, does the Minister seriously believe that the French, Spanish or Greeks will be happy to allow the agricultural exports from

[Mr. Peter Hardy]

Czechoslovakia, Hungary or Poland to enter their countries? Would there be no protests from French farmers as Czechoslovakian, Hungarian and Polish agricultural products sought to enter their markets? We are in danger of leading the newly emergent countries of eastern Europe into believing that the west will be as co-operative as the west appears to promise.

As I have said, within two years there will be a Europe of 45. It is possible to list the various republics that will comprise that number. It is less than two years since Finland became the 23rd member state of the Council of Europe when we celebrated its 40th anniversary. One can only marvel at the pace of change politically in Europe. That change embraces the concept of extensions of human rights which are politically highly desirable. Unless the political change is matched by an economic wisdom that none of us has yet perceived and which is scarcely discernible, given the appalling way in which the House is kept informed of changes in Europe——

Mr. Garel-Jones *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hardy: It is no good the Minister shaking his head. How much opportunity has the House had to consider properly the dramatic changes that have taken place in Europe? Leaving aside the contribution of Opposition Members, how much of an opportunity has the House had to consider the contribution made by the Government in pursuit of those changes?

We are having a late-night debate when the House is scarcely given a proper opportunity to see documents or to consider the facts. Specious promises are offered in a document that seems to present much but actually offers little. It is time that, in Britain and in the rest of western Europe, we saw much more vision and common sense. The serious political changes that are now taking place are not being matched by anything like mature economic consideration.

One cannot say that the debate takes us any further, except of course, that it gives one the opportunity to pay tribute to some Conservative Members, particularly the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate, who has become the President of the Council of Europe and who deserves rather more consideration than he has been given by some of his hon. Friends.

11.4 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): There surely can be no doubt that the draft interim agreements are a modest but most definite step in the direction that we all want to see, which is the creation throughout Europe of a great confederation of free republics and monarchies—free democracies—operating free markets and achieving market prosperity. That is the aim for which the previous generation fought the second world war. At the end, those people were cheated and they found that half of Europe had been cut off and denied the democracy, free enterprise and markets that brought great prosperity to western Europe.

This is clearly the right step forward. It is not, of course, anything near the certain road to full membership, which I should like to see. The small print of the draft agreements shows that although the parties seeking to associate themselves—the troika of Poland, the Czech and Slovak federal republic and Hungary—believe that by signing them the objective of membership is recognised, that is a rather one-sided affair. It is only on their side that there is hope that they will achieve that objective. There is no guarantee provided by the signatories of the Community that it will lead to membership. The reality is that that prospect lies a considerable way away, whether we like it or not.

I agree with the eloquent words of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg), who plays such a distinguished part in the Council of Europe, that if those countries fail, will be our failure. If they do not succeed, having thrown off tryanny and making it all the way to open and free societies, the cost for us will not merely be that we blame ourselves; there will be direct and ugly costs in terms of destabilisation, migrant movements and pressures which could be very unsettling. There would be a weakness in the whole economic flank of western Europe, and even darker forces could be unleashed to upset the tranquility of the previous 40 years in western Europe on which one will look back. The stakes are very high and they must, by all efforts, succeed. If, in the long run, we do not allow the goods to come into western Europe and, indeed, into the wider world, the people will. That will be an awful trade-off, and there will be very little that we can do to prevent it.

Those must be the long-run aims. They will be very long run, for obvious reasons. First, although the economies about which we are talking have begun to be transformed, they are still far from being anything like market economies and far from operating sensible price structures. There is no way in which, tomorrow morning, they could link into full-blown, treaty of Rome, Commission-negotiated membership of the classic Community.

Secondly, whether we like it or not—some hon. Members clearly do not like it at all, and I understand why—the agricultural interests of western Europe, already under seige and deeply protected, will not allow the vast agricultural output of those countries—for example, the huge arable output of the Danubian plain and the vast meat output of Poland—to come rolling into western Europe or, possibly, on to world markets. There is no question of full membership in that sense being permitted for many years to come—indeed, it is very hard to see at this stage how that could ever happen.

The third reason why there will be resistance to full membership is enlargement indigestion. Earlier this afternoon, we debated the arrival of the "Eftans" in the European economic area agreement. Five of them are rapidly lining up to become full members of the Community. Most of them want to do so by 1995. The bureaucrats of the Community look on that alone with great alarm. The prospect of the further three being full members, even by the year 2000, fills people with dismay, particularly those who believe passionately in the original tight-knit European Community structure as set out by the treaty of Rome.

Those of us who want a change of direction to a wider Europe believe that with enlargement, provided that the process is handled carefully, a European union better than the one that we have at present can be created. That is certainly my wish. But for those who operate the finer points of the negotiation inside the Commission, enlargement at this speed, involving not merely the five "Eftans" but the three which are the subject of the

association agreements and many other countries besides, as the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) suggested, is a dangerous prospect. It could dilute and fundamentally change the Community as we know it.

I wish to ask three questions about the scene that lies before us with Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. First, to what extent will the draft association agreements fill part of the gap and meet any of the immediate need of the three new democracies? Of course they will help, but I am not sure that they are enough. The need of those countries is obviously not merely to get some trade going, to have know-how support, project aid and budget aid and to have their currencies finally stabilised; it is psychologically to feel that for certain they are part of the European community—community with a small "c", the community of the free Europe—and that they will not be sucked back into any form of militarism or fascism, particularly with the vortex of chaos developing on their eastern flank in the extremely shaky Commonwealth of Independent States.

These countries want firm links of a political nature that will begin to bind them into the freer and wider Europe that we all want to see. I hope that it will be the absolute priority of the British Government during our presidency to ensure that the association agreements are not only put in place fully—that must be so—but thickened and developed and that they offer more than merely signatures on bits of paper with officials then saying, "Goodbye, we are off to Brussels again, see you in a few years." That would not be good enough.

We need to think in terms of stronger political links now for the three countries, which are all in extreme danger. Living standards are falling in all of them. Even in Hungary, which we think of as successful, living standards are precarious. As a result, the democracies are precarious. The countries are living on a diet of hope and prayer and the belief that just round the corner a few years away there really will be a turnaround, or on a diet of overspill of deutschmarks from the vastly funded former East Germany which is their neighbour. But it is a precarious existence and it could collapse at any moment.

The three countries need support now and we have to think about how that can be given. Of course, the small print of the association agreements offers more than just the hope of some asymmetrical lowering of trade barriers and the distance promise of a little agricultural trade one day. The agreements offer a political consultation procedure and imply that Heads of Government and Ministers of the three countries and the leaders of western Europe will met regularly. That will help. Some network of closer links can be developed there.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate spoke about the Council of Europe and he has personally given great leadership on that front. It clearly provides—"waiting room" is the wrong phrase—a place where the new democracies can stand shoulder to shoulder with, exchange views with and begin to understand the new world which they have joined and to which they are welcome.

On the security side, there is the famous North Atlantic Consultative Council, which is NATO's attempt, if not to extend its guarantees, to extend some shadow of security to eastern European countries. They need it. They need a security framework. That is on offer, but the NACC is a large club. It includes all the successor states of the former Soviet Union and it may not be enough. The countries of eastern Europe will probably need something else.

We have to ask why we cannot link Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia now with other aspects of the new European union that we have just invented. At Maastricht we set up not a European Community—that is the past—but a European union, which includes the Community and the new pillars of foreign and security policy and other policies.

There is no reason why there should not be ministerial-level collaboration on a formal basis with those countries, so that, without facing the full rigours of the market or the full requirements of the negotiating procedures of the Commission, they can be involved, here and now, in a European entity. That could even be a political union, or the greater European union that many of us want to see and that will take us far beyond, and wider than, the old EC.

I welcome what has been done, but it is only a start. We are looking now, as we did in the earlier debate about the EFTA countries' membership of the European economic area, at the shape of the European union to come. It is not like the past. Maastricht was not a stepping stone to another bout of the same kind of Europe. Thanks not least to the vast skills that my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary used in their negotiations, it was, as we shall see when we debate ratification, a change of direction for Europe. It was a move towards a union that will be a home for these new democracies. We fought a war to bring freedom to them and failed. Now, we have another chance.

11.15 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): I wish first to associate myself most warmly with the remarks made by the hon. Members for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg). Both struck exactly the right note, and put the debate in proportion. The election of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate as president of the Council of Europe following the resignation of Anders Björck is well-deserved, and we can see why he deserved it from what he said.

I shall not repeat what the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) said about the debate, but I associate myself with it entirely. It makes a mockery of all this stuff about the pre-eminence of Parliament if we do not have the documents and are given a mere weekend's notice. It is all very well for the Minister to say that the documents were available on Friday, but everyone knows where Members of Parliament are on Friday—in their constituencies. Then we are given only an hour and a half for the debate. It is not very good, is it?

As hon. Members have said, what we are debating is of the greatest importance not only for Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, but for the former Soviet Union. The move to democracy in these three countries has coincided with the break-up of the Soviet union. Their position, as forward examples of the success of the free economy, is of the greatest importance.

The explanatory memorandum refers in its first paragraph to the association agreement being founded on a United Kingdom proposal. I am sure that this is correct, but I would be happier if we stopped boasting about our

[Sir Russell Johnston]

role when the help that we give in trade and aid is noticeably less than that given by others. The increase in trade achieved by the three countries with the west has, to a small extent, offset the loss of commerce with the Soviet Union, but it has been with Germany, which is now the major trading partner of all these three countries. Germany has likewise been in the lead in providing aid. When I recall the remarks made in the Chamber after the unification of Germany, about the threat that it would represent—some of the more notable came from a right hon. Member who was at that time a Minister—I think that those who made them should hang their heads in shame.

As the hon. Member for Hamilton said, the political stability of central Europe is of the utmost importance, but equally the restructuring of economies there can be seen to be of enormous complexity and difficulty. Goodness knows, the Germans are finding this in what was East Germany, and the situation in these three countries is more difficult still because they do not have the resources that the Germans can provide or the expertise for the managerial takeover in which they are engaged.

At the end of last year, I was one of the Council of Europe observers at the Polish elections and spent a cold, snowy day in Poznan, which was the scene of terrible riots many years ago. It was very orderly and quiet—almost dull. The turnout was miserable—under 40 per cent.—and, as the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate has already mentioned, representation was hugely fragmented.

The hon. Member for Hamilton said that if visible progress was not made in an acceptable period there would be the danger of a return to authoritarianism. That is certainly not impossible, for hunger drives out democracy very quickly. The hon. Gentleman was also right to point to the size of the know-how fund: £30 million is not insignificant, certainly, but it will not make all that much of an impression. The Minister may ask, "How much would you make it?" I am not in the business of doing that sort of thing; I am simply saying that I am tired of people being self-congratulatory about what they are not entitled to congratulate themselves about.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Wentworth and the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) were right to pay particular attention to the difficulties affecting agriculture. I am equally sure, however, that the idea of triangular trade—in other words, helping the countries to export to what was the Soviet Union—is the easiest solution, at least in the short term.

We are talking about transition from a communist economy to a free economy; we are talking, we hope, about a transition that willl lead to membership of the European Community—some years hence, but within a perceptible period. We are talking about how we can help in that process. The proposals are certainly a step forward, but I do not think that we should congratulate ourselves too much: a good deal more is needed.

11.21 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): Until the Maastricht summit, there was, in my view, a real danger that the iron curtain would be replaced by a silver curtain dividing the rich from the poor in Europe, and that the Community would commit itself to ever-greater union without regard to the rest of the continent. As my right hon. Friend the Minister has just reminded us, it is thanks to our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's insistence that the negotiations of last summer have led to the agreements that we are discussing.

Nevertheless, the agreements have not come before time, given that the democratic revolutions in the countries concerned took place over two years ago; nor do they reflect the enormous scale of the problems that those countries face as they attempt to move from central, planned economies to a free market, with the ending of subsidies, the inflation and unemployment that are inevitable in such transitions and the social and industrial unrest that is happening in all three countries to varying degrees.

We need only look at the defence industries of the three countries—we are debating this at the Western European Union in December—to see the extent of the devastation that their economies now face. Czechoslovakia's defence industry alone faces a decline of 80 per cent., and the lack of research and development is rendering the remaining 20 per cent. obsolete. Poland's huge over-capacity in the manufacture of arms and equipment offers little hope of conversion, while Hungary's defence industry is almost non-existent; what is left of it now faces bankruptcy.

We can and do provide help and technical assistance through the Community's PHARE programme, and through our own know-how fund. It is, however, the opportunity to trade—to sell to the rest of us in the Community, through a reduction in the number of barriers—that represents the most immediate and practical help that we can offer now. As my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) said a few moments ago, the agreements provide for a transitional period of up to 10 years. That can be of no help when help is most wanted—now.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) mentioned the private conversation that he had with President Walesa when he visited the Council of Europe two weeks ago. No wonder he reminded the parliamentary Assembly that it was his country that had cracked communism and freed the West from the cold war, which had, in turn, enabled us to reap the peace dividend. He felt that he was entitled to more help than that provided by the agreement. How right he is.

I hope that my right hon. Friend can assure the House that more opportunities to trade will soon be available to those three countries than those contained in the agreements. I hope that he can assure us that all the remaining COCOM restrictions against those countries will be lifted—none of them pose any threat to us now. I hope that he can confirm that the agreements will be extended to include the emerging democracies of eastern Europe, which will soon qualify for full membership of the Council of Europe. Bulgaria almost certainly qualifies, as it recently held elections. The Baltic states, Romania as well as Slovenia and Croatia, which we have now recognised, will also soon qualify for membership. Even Albania, which is in such desperate need of help now, will become eligible for membership.

Within the Balkans and other parts of central and eastern Europe there is growing, worrying evidence of a gradual but persistent return to old practices—hostility against minorities, conflict within states and friction, even conflict, between some of those states. It was the precise aim of the original European Community to ensure that

each member state had a vested interest in avoiding such conflicts. That principle must now apply throughout the continent, not just through the conference on security and co-operation in Europe, the CSCE, but through free trade. That is the only way in which democracy will succeed and human rights can be guaranteed.

The agreements are just the start. They must be extended as soon as possible.

11.26 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): There are many political and economic matters of overwhelming importance, but I do not apologise for returning to the issue of the architectural and artistic heritage of Bohemia.

I believe that I speak for the Minister's hon. Friends, the Members for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), for Milton Keynes (Mr. Benyon) and for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) and my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) as well as for Lord Craythorne and Lady David and others who had the good fortune to go on the all-party heritage group trip to Prague for three days.

The issue relates to thefts that are occurring in the present circumstances. The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) has written to me about this:

"It is indeed ironic that the coming of democracy has brought with it regrettable incidents of this kind."

The Foreign Office has confirmed that it too has evidence of thefts, particularly of wood carvings, The Minister also said:

"This is, of course, a matter for the Czechoslovak police, who will, no doubt, do their best to prevent thefts of this kind. But they are at present going through a major process of change."

We should help them in that process of change. The Minister says that we are providing such help, but what precise help has been given and how much are we giving through the know-how fund? Comparatively small sums could do a great deal to save much of that heritage.

The Minister also noted that a police advisory team had been sent to Czechoslovakia, and said:

"This has been very useful and we understand that the team's recommendations are being followed up. A more efficient police force, better able to deal with criminal activities, and more publicly accountable, should be the result of the changes."

Since that letter of January, has the Foreign Office monitored those changes? The Minister accepted in that letter:

"There are, of course, practical problems in preventing this particular kind of crime. As you say, many of the carvings are in run-down churches, often in remote areas. It would be virtually impossible for all to be protected sufficiently to prevent thefts."

I recall one moving incident in Czechoslovakia when we got off our bus, suddenly and unexpectedly, and the local people locked the British parliamentarians inside the church. We were a bit surprised at that, but, on reflection, it was all too obvious that they had been subject to such raids on their own shrines on previous occasions, which they had been unable to do much about. Understandably, they were suspicious of us.

The letter goes on:

"The final point of control within Czechoslovakia is, of course, at the border. While border controls have been relaxed since the revolution in 1989, Czechoslovak customs officers are, I am sure, on the look-out for items of this kind.

Given the economic circumstances of many of those customs officers, we should not be too surprised if there is often a nod and a wink. That is the point of my intervention. The Foreign Office has a moral obligation to talk seriously to the London art market—and to the art markets of Munich, Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Vienna, as well as New York and San Fransisco. If we are serious about doing something, we must ensure that considerable sums of money are not to be made out of Czechoslovakia in the fruitful western art market. I hope that the Government will do something about that.

The group had a meeting of an hour and three quarters with Mr. Dubcek, and many other meetings with Czechs and Slovaks. As one who is immersed in the problems of minorities, I think that it would be tragic if, as the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) said, a situation developed in which those two peoples drifted apart. No one can know the future, and the west has a moral obligation to do as much as possible to prevent that from happening.

11.31 pm

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): First, I pay a speedy tribute to my Council of Europe colleagues on both sides of the House, including the Liberal spokesman on European affairs, for their contribution to such debates, which often take place in the Council of Europe's meeting place in Strasbourg and other places. The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) referred to the meeting that took place in Hungary.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have been reticent about suggesting how much money should be spent. I shall be courageous or stupid enough to suggest a figure. Three and a half years ago, I proposed to the Council of Europe the outlines of what was loosely labelled a "Strasbourg plan". The price ticket on it was £400 billion spread over four years. The figure was not simply scratched out of the sky but was an extrapolation of what the United States gave to western Europe in far easier circumstances after the second world war in support of the Marshall plan, and I have brought it up to today's prices.

It is worth mentioning that, if only to draw to the House's attention the fact that, however much we are doing—we can be proud of what the Government are doing in support of know-how and of what the European Community is doing through PHARE—it is so small compared to what we should be doing to ensure the development of democracies and free economies in those countries. They have the knowledge and desperate desire to succeed, yet they cannot do so—not for lack of trade opportunities, although those must be given, but for lack of know-how, investment and wherewithal.

11.34 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): My right hon. Friend the Minister will be aware of some of the reservations that I have expressed about how the European Community develops, but I hope that he will not be surprised to hear me welcome the association agreements with these three countries. I regard this as an important widening of the European Community. There are jolly good and sound political and strategic reasons for accommodating these three countries. It is desirable to help them towards full

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membership. They are historically and culturally part of Europe and they are industrious nations which are by inclination capitalist.

The Minister spoke about reducing trade barriers. It is important to encourage trade, because trade rather than aid will ultimately lead to the prosperity that we want these countries to enjoy. However, we are on the horns of a dilemma, because the last thing that western Europe needs at present is more food, in which it is in surplus. There is enormous potential in those eastern European countries, but given the profit motive, modern plant and machinery and access to western technology, they will produce much more food than Europe can consume.

I understand the case for facilitating trade in agricultural products. We have to start somewhere, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) said, some of the industrial products of those countries are no longer in demand. For example, there is no demand for armaments. Possibly the only feasible trade that we can encourage is in agricultural products. We must not encourage additional trade in those products without paying regard to its effect upon United Kingdom farmers; nor can we ignore the legitimate concern of consumers about the health and hygiene standards applied to agricultural products from eastern Europe. Hon. Members will know that no country in Europe has the equivalent of our food safety Acts.

Help to eastern Europe cannot extend to lowering or waiving the food standards that we regard as important for the protection of our consumers. United Kingdom farmers and consumers will want the Minister's assurance that there will be a level playing field, even though we want to do all that we can to encourage trade with these nations. I trust that the Minister will assure the House that there will be no compromise on food standards.

11.57 pm

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): There has been some discussion about the non-availability of documents. However, the content of the documents and the drift of the negotiations have been widely reported for some time, and I understand that the documents were available to the Select Committee last month. To say that the documents were suddenly made available last week is not entirely accurate. It is worth reflecting on the difficulty that sometimes arises in the EC of getting documents finalised. I shall not dwell on the matter, because we are dealing with rather wider issues.

In many ways, the documents are deeply disappointing. Both Front-Bench speakers engaged in much high-sounding talk about the need for liberalisation and for trade. The documents are deeply protectionist. They show that, at the very time when eastern Europe needs to trade with us and when countries there are struggling to open their economies, to turn them into market economies and to wrench them away from the dead hand of central control and central planning, we are preaching the sort of free market policies that we are not prepared to put into practice.

We are saying that we will not open our markets to their goods for the next five to 10 years. At the end of that period, European industries and special interest groups which have pleaded so strongly for continuing trade barriers will be back asking for more. Even within the limited agreements, it is not clear from the documents—but it is clear from secret agreements that have been leaked to the *Financial Times*—that even the goods that the eastern European countries will be allowed to sell to the European Community will be strictly limited by price support and price maintenance agreements. So those eastern European industries will not be able to undercut the industries of the EC. So much for free trade and free markets.

These documents maintain barriers against the very types of low added value, unsophisticated products that the eastern European countries could sell to western Europe: food, steel, textiles and coal. The EC, for all its benefits, has unfortunately become the prisoner of special interest groups and industrial lobbies which find access to the EC's decision-making processes far easier than do the mass of voters or those who represent wider consumer interests.

I do not blame the Government for these documents, because we had to negotiate at the EC and I know that the Government adopted a more liberal approach at the EC, but I wish that our Government had pushed a little harder. Our own Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food took a slightly disreputable stance on some issues, especially raspberries. To protect a small group of farmers in this country, strict limits were placed on imports from countries such as Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): When I tell the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), he will be looking for you.

Mr. Oppenheim: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not carry out that threat.

It is small-minded of the EC to adopt this attitude. Ultimately, it will not help us; it will raise prices in western Europe and the EC. Protection and the lack of competition will not really help these industries—they never do. Indeed, it is in the long-term economic interests of the EC to move out of precisely this type of low added value, unsophisticated industry.

There has been a great deal of talk in recent months about aid for eastern Europe. What these countries need even more than aid is the ability to trade. Unfortunately, the documents do not give them as wide an ability to trade as they really need. If, over the next few years, the slow steps towards market economies and proper democracy falter in eastern Europe, a large measure of responsibility for that will rest with the European Community and the industries which have lobbied for these protectionist measures—because they have been too small-minded at such an important juncture in the history of Europe.

11.42 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): I shall deal mainly with the agricultural issue, because that seems to preoccupy Members most. If I do not have a chance to reply to all the other issues that have been raised, I shall make sure that a reply is given later—*[Interruption.]* I refer, for instance, to Polish visas, about which the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) is muttering.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) and to all hon. Members who serve on the Council of Europe for their

work with that body. I might be expected to sympathise with anyone who has the sense to meet in Strasbourg, given my past.

I want to address the issue head on. Agriculture is a sensitive issue. There is no point in pretending that it deals in products like any other. The Community is struggling under its heavy surpluses and heavy budgetary costs, as well as the heavy economic costs of agriculture. Member states are necessarily reticent about liberalising trade if that will have a displacement effect in increasing the costs of the policy.

The fact is that every country was involved in the agreement, one or two member states with slightly more reluctance than others. Once these products enter the Community, they circulate freely throughout it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) mentioned raspberries, which illustrate the dilemma. We have faced a long-running problem with imports of raspberries from the countries of eastern Europe. The fruit tends to go into the processing and jamming industry. It competes with the raspberries grown on Tayside in Scotland. As a result, the industry there has found itself in severe straits. My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) would endorse the remark that Mr. MacSharry has promised a structural plan for the Tayside raspberry growers, but it has been a long time coming: we are now promised it for April.

Should we say that it is best to give processors the lowest-cost raw materials, and bring in raspberries, which are then treated with some sort of preservative—they are then eventually made into jam, with the assistance of dyes to restore their red colour—or should we decide to achieve a balance between those interests and the interests of the producers in the EC, given the cost structures under which they labour?

At the end of the day, does it benefit the people in the countries of eastern Europe if they put products on the European market at prices that cannot be sustained and that do not represent a fair economic return to them? It is a genuine dilemma. It is impossible to satisfy everybody. One has to devise a mean, and that is what we have tried to do. I hope that my hon. Friends do not think that we have been too disreputable in doing that, but it is an issue that has to be tackled.

Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary were given reduced quotas for all the agricultural products for which they asked for concessions. The starting point was the current level. The tariff quota system means that, as the quantity rises, so the levy is reduced. The rise in quantity is 10 per cent. a year over five years—that is simple, not compound—giving a 50 per cent. improvement. The levy is reduced by 20 per cent. a year for three years, amounting to a 60 per cent. reduction.

The products most likely to be used for trading purposes are beef, sheepmeat—where there is already a voluntary restraint agreement—pigmeat, the only area where the quantities concerned start at a slightly higher level than is already being sent, poulty, where the United Kingdom already imposes fairly stringent animal health rules so that precious little poultry comes from eastern Europe at the moment, and cereals, where previously there were large exports to the German Democratic Republic. That was the magic market for products from eastern Europe, but the market has virtually disappeared.

Skimmed milk powder, butter, cheese and horticultural products are likely to reach the United Kingdom more than others because of the ease of transport. The generalised scheme of preferences concessions already given to these countries cover mainly pigmeat, poultry and horticulture, and are consolidated in the agreement.

Some people ask why all this produce does not go to the former Soviet Union, since that would be by far the easiest solution. The answer is that the increase in the quota can be offset against what is called triangular trade. Some member states would like that to continue for as long as possible, because it keeps that produce away from the European marketplace.

France, Germany and the others have agreed to open their borders to agricultural produce. All the other member states have signed the association agreements. The Community is a single market. Imports crossing the frontiers can come to any member state. The Mediterranean countries are likely to have less difficulty over imports, as the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) mentioned, because their products compete less with the kind of products that come from eastern Europe.

It is difficult to estimate the costs of the common agricultural policy. There are many variables. There is uncertainty about how reform of the common agricultural policy will work out. There is also uncertainty about the outcome of the GATT negotiations, and therefore about the prospects for world markets and the unit costs of export refunds—one of the essential components in determining the costs of the CAP.

There is great uncertainty over the extent to which Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia can maintain their traditional links with the former Soviet Union, to which a great deal of their trade was geared. On my recent visit to east Germany, I went to the Treuhand, where an attempt is being made to privatise a whole raft of companies. The great problem is that the output of many of those companies is geared towards the market in the Soviet Union which virtually ceased to exist overnight.

Collectively, the three countries produce about the same volume, in output terms, as the old West Germany. If, therefore, a substantial proportion went to European Community markets and if the unit costs of surplus disposals were not reduced, there could be a significant increase in the budgetary cost of the common agricultural policy. But "you pays your money and you takes your choice". If one chooses to liberalise and says, rightly, that a certain commodity is the one that these countries have most readily to sell to the west, that it is our duty to help them and that therefore we must accept a certain level of imports, we cannot say at the same time, "We're awfully sorry, but we must pretend that no cost is involved in doing this." That must be part of the political decision-making process.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) is concerned about health standards. I recognise that farmers say, "We're quite willing to help. We understand that health standards are needed, but will it be a level playing field? Are we going to find that cheap, nasty or unhealthy products come on to the European market while pressure is put upon us to upgrade our standards, to observe the rules and to pay the costs of upgrading those standards?" The answer, when dealing with livestock products, is that they can be shipped only from abattoirs that meet standards that have been approved by the European Community. If a product does not meet animal health rules or if there is an animal health concern such as

[Mr. David Curry]

Newcastle disease in poultry or offal from eastern Europe for the pet food industry, it does not enter the United Kingdom.

Under the Food Safety Act 1990, we can inspect products as they come in from third countries, and if they present a risk they can be returned. Documentary and identity checks are made—we look in the boxes that come from third countries. Where undertakings have been given about the quality and status of the product, we shall enforce those requirements. It does importers no good if they get a reputation for sending produce that is not up to standard, any more than it does the United Kingdom any good to accept products that pose a threat to health standards. The third countries know that they must address that genuine concern.

The hon. Member for Hamilton gave us his personal memories of the Berlin wall. We all recognise that such an emotional charge is legitimate—anyone who had not faced the events of the past few years with some emotion would be less than a normal human being—but we cannot sustain the east European countries on the basis of continuing emotion. We must offer practical help that we can sustain; we must be able to afford it, or we shall end up in conflict.

The agreement is the first step towards such sustained association, eventually leading to membership. The decisions were difficult, but it is a substantial form of help. It is the most practical help, and it is to be welcomed as the first stage in eventual greater union in the EC that will embrace those countries.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Minister give an undertaking to approach the arts markets in relation to the Bohemian carvings?

Mr. Curry: If the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food were to approach the arts markets, they would regard it with a certain curiosity. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office has heard what the hon. Gentleman said, and no doubt he will wish to take his suggestion to heart.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of the proposals described in the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 29th November 1991, relating to Association Agreements between the Community and its Member States and Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and European Community Document No. 10561/91, relating to interim agreements between the Community and Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia; welcomes the principle of Association Agreements between the European Community and the reforming democracies of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia; recognises that these Agreements will offer them substantial benefits by encouraging trade with the Community, enhancing political co-operation, and strengthening links with the European Community to which these countries have expressed a wish to accede; and looks forward to early ratification of the Agreements.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Community Airports (Slots)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102 (European Standing Committees).

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 4496/91 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of Transport on 3rd February 1992, relating to the allocation of slots at Community airports; notes that the principle of efficient, neutral and transparent airport co-ordination is in line with the Government's aims; notes the strengths of the existing worldwide system of slot allocation; and endorses the Government's intention to respond to the draft Regulation on the premise that any change to the system should benefit users without creating practical difficulties for the civil aviation industry, and without substantially extending the role of governments in slot allocation.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Question agreed to.

Transport (London)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

11.52 pm

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I welcome the opportunity to debate the transport difficulties that many Londoners experience. London has high unemployment, housing shortages and hospital and education needs, but the transport needs of the capital are high on the list of any London Member.

We can all make statements and give facts and figures on any issue, but after 12 years of Conservative Government one cannot see any major ongoing improvement in the transport services of London. Indeed, not only Members of Parliament but many outside organisations regard a strategic planning authority to co-ordinate all aspects of transport in London as a major issue. We are still waiting for such an authority, but its establishment will be one of the top priorities of the incoming Labour Government. It is common sense to introduce such a policy because, throughout the 32 London boroughs, one often finds that one borough has absolutely no idea of the road development plans or traffic policy of the adjoining borough.

Whenever one opens one's post, one can be certain that some letters will express concern about London's transport systems. One has only to sit in on Transport questions to hear the complaints. As I read the correspondence that I receive, I often wonder why we are in such a mess in London. Why is public transport so unattractive for so many people?

We have just had a debate involving members of the Council of Europe. I am also a member of the Council of Europe and I very often use public transport in European cities and towns. We have many meetings in Paris: when one compares the Paris metro with the London underground, one finds in Paris an efficient, clean and much cheaper service than that in London, and people use the system in Paris. The entire network has modern trains; stations are being modernised and there is a real commitment by Governments—irrespective of their political complexion—to public transport. If only the same thing had happened in this country, the criticism that hon. Members and I make would not be applicable.

I shall deal now with the underground services affecting my constituency. To his credit, about 18 months ago the Minister for Public Transport came to my constituency and travelled on the Northern line, so he knows the problems and complaints. However, it is still an utter disgrace that we expect thousands of people to travel on that line. The Northern line is not the only problem, but it goes through my constituency. There is a continuing problem of escalators that do not work. At Tooting Bec station, one escalator is out of action and I am told that it will remain so for a considerable time. That causes various problems for people who want to use that station.

Against that background, fares are increased year by year. Even so, the Minister is not able to say, "Yes, I agree that fares are high, but look at the quality of the service that the commuters get for paying high fares." The tragedy is that they do not get a good service.

It is the same story with buses.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): I draw to my hon. Friend's attention the fact that bus services in south Yorkshire were deregulated, and there is mention of bus deregulation in London. The public were told at the time that they would have a better service and cheaper fares. We have had a worse service, complaints from all over Doncaster—indeed, from all over South Yorkshire—fewer passengers and higher fares, and the public can no longer afford to use the effective transport service that we used to have. I warn my hon. Friend to beware of Government promises about deregulation. The Minister might want to comment on that.

Mr. Cox: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment. I was going to mention deregulation briefly because it is obviously being mentioned more and more in London. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) specialises in this subject and I know that, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will want to contribute to the debate.

What is the Government's vision for buses and road policy in general? A few years ago, the London assessment studies were carried out and vast sums of money were going to be spent on supposed road improvements. The area that I represent was to get the western environmental route improvement scheme. But once the general public became aware of what the scheme would do to the community, they rebelled, with the result that the proposed system was conveniently dropped. When schemes of that sort were under discussion, vast sums were to be allocated. Many of us would like to know where the money has gone that was set aside for road development schemes in many areas of London. Has it been used to fund other improvements in the transport system?

The Minister may say that red routes are part of the Government's policy. I can only say that they constitute a scheme that has not caught the imagination of the community in Islington. By and large, it has seen no improvements as a result of the introduction of the red route. Indeed, traders have faced additional obstacles during a difficult trading period.

In January, the Freight Transport Association published a document entitled "Transport Dilemma". Among other things, it called for better-quality public transport that would be supported financially by government, with pump-priming investment subsidies. Are we to hear from the Minister that there is a real commitment? Whatever has been invested by the Government over recent years, it has not developed the transport system. Investment has ensured only that the service continues to run while attempts have been made to improve existing services. The services that so many of us believe are needed urgently have not been developed.

What has Government funding amounted to when set against the moneys that have been sought by London Transport over a three-year period? What Government assistance was London Transport seeking and what did the Government give it to enable improvements to be made? It will do no good for the Minister to say that there are difficulties, that the country faces problems and that there must be restraint. London Members and London commuters say that there have been no good years. There have been no years during which those who run the buses or the underground service in London have been able to

[Mr. Cox]

say, "How well the Government have responded to us." Year by year, that which was sought has not been approved.

It cannot be said that Britain is a poor country. The North sea has brought us enormous wealth. Whatever we may think of privatisation, enormous sums have come into the country as a result of it. The two sources have produced astronomical figures. How much of that money has been used to introduce improvements, especially in education? I shall bring my remarks to an end because I want to give my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

In a few weeks' time, we shall be facing a general election. Whatever the smears and abuses—sadly, the start of the campaign has introduced them already—there will be real issues, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) said, the general public in London and the rest of the United Kingdom will want to know where the parties stand. In my view, no issue will be of greater interest than where the parties stand on public transport.

We have seen what the Government have done in the past 12 years. We have had neither improvements nor the Government commitment that there should have been. I am sure that the public will welcome the opportunity when the election comes to pass judgment on the Government's record and decide what they believe an incoming Labour Government can do. That will be the real test, and many of us will welcome the opportunity for the people to judge the Government's record and to decide on the basis of that record.

12.5 am

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) for having raised this matter tonight, and to the Minister for attending the debate at short notice.

One party—the Prime Minister, no less—has made his position clear, certainly on the matter of buses. On deregulation elsewhere, the right hon. Gentleman's citizens charter says:

"Deregulation has produced an expansion of both long-distance coach and local bus services and . . . passengers now enjoy a far wider variety of operation and services than before . . . We now intend to extend the benefits of a deregulated bus industry to London".

Of course, it will be privatised, too.

I was very surprised at the news, and wrote to the Prime Minister because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) pointed out, in other metropolitan areas of Britain, the reverse is happening. In my hon. Friend's part of the world—South Yorkshire—passenger mileage fell by 21 per cent. between 1986 and 1988. In Merseyside, it was 30 per cent.

I wrote to the Prime Minister and pointed that out. On 22 August, he replied—ironically, as it turns out tonight—

"The evidence from outside London shows clearly that deregulation has resulted in a more innovative approach to the provision of bus services, with an increase in the number of buses and in total bus mileage operated. If you wish to pursue this point further, I am sure Roger Freeman will be able to cite chapter and verse".

The right hon. Gentleman may be able to say that bus mileage has increased, but bus numbers fell by 3,000 in the metropolitan areas, as returns to the Association of Metropolitan Authorities showed.

It is ironic that, in answer to a parliamentary question on 22 July—during the very month in which the charter was published—the Secretary of State for Transport praised London Transport thus:

"London Transport . . . has done so much already to improve the quality of services provided by buses in London."

I would not altogether go along with that—especially as LT has had its subsidies from taxpayers and charge payers cut. Having praised London Transport, however, the Government intend to deregulate and privatise all at once, and take us back to the days of the private buses and transport chaos that existed in London before LT was created in 1933—with all-party agreement, I might add—and became a world model transport agency.

We have a degree of integration in transport. The travelcard, which is well advertised, is an example. In the answer that I quoted, the Secretary of State said:

"The Government will be working actively with operators in the coming months to encourage them to come up with their own proposals for such schemes after deregulation."

That refers to the travelcard. The Secretary of State's reply continued:

"It was therefore decided that it is neither necessary nor appropriate to legislate to secure the future of the present Travelcard scheme or to ensure that a suitable successor scheme is devised."

So there is to be no legislation for that.

What about the rightly prized old-age pensioner's travelcard, brought in by the Greater London council, which was a boon to all London's pensioners? The Government rightly say that that will continue, but it is important to note that the answer to which I referred says:

"The London boroughs will have the same discretion as local authorities elsewhere to vary the terms of their concessionary arrangements. However, they will . . . be required to operate a Londonwide discretionary travel scheme."—[*Official Report*, 22 July 1991; Vol. 195, c. 333-36.]

However, there is a choice to charge, and the boroughs do not charge at the moment.

Why was that included if not to allow some authorities, the political persuasions of which I can guess, the freedom to charge? We had a great battle in the early 1970s all over London because some Tory authorities were unwilling to contribute. We managed to get over that, but the parliamentary answer to which I referred clearly threatens to put the clock back.

As I said, London's transport became the envy of the world in the 1930s. It was an integrated system that was willed by the House and by the people of London. It was owned by the people of London. Long ago, we had our own tram services in East Ham and West Ham. They were later converted to trolley buses. We own the buses in London. Although they may not be perfect, they are subject to improvement. We can ask Ministers about them. They are the property of the people of London whom we represent.

The buses should not be sold off, particularly not to pirates from Hong Kong. That might sound a little far-fetched, but any busman will confirm that some of the operators who are hovering in the wings come from as far away as Hong Kong. We are all aware that the Government sell our assets to people from abroad.

We are not considering a citizens charter or a passengers charter for the people of London. If it ever comes to pass, it will become a citizens' nightmare.

12.10 am

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on securing this debate on the important subject of improved transport in greater London. The hon. Gentleman's solution to the problems that he described was the creation of a strategic planning authority—the Greater London authority. Doubtless we shall argue the merits of that at the hustings.

The Government believe that that is the wrong way to approach transport provision and planning in London. The Department of Transport fulfils the major part of that remit and, within the Department, the London transportation unit has a specific responsibility for the co-ordination of planning information for the provision of public transport services in London and for road planning.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning and I regularly meet the LPAC—the London Planning Advisory Committee—and the Department of Transport sponsors several assessment studies which consider road and rail options in different parts of London, and the hon. Member for Tooting referred to several of those. If we consider the Government's record over the past 12 years on better quality public transport, the phrase used by the hon. Member for Tooting, the House will agree that there has been significant improvements. The record is good in relation to development.

The Government have accepted the recommendations of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in respect of London Underground for a level of funding for the existing underground of about £700 million per annum. That level will be reached in 1993. We accepted that recommendation, which means that a massive programme of improvements will be made to the Central line amounting to more than £700 million. In addition, individual stations will be refurbished. For example, the Angel will be refurbished at a cost of £70 million. Other stations will also be improved.

At the southern end of the Northern line, about which the hon. Member for Tooting is particularly concerned, the modernisation of stations at Tooting Broadway, Tooting Bec, Clapham South and Clapham North will proceed. However, the complete refurbishment of the Northern line cannot commence until the massively expensive Central line programme is complete. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that it is sensible to move from major programme to major programme on the underground.

The Government have consistently supported the construction of new underground lines, and I hope very much that the construction of the Jubilee line will commence shortly if Parliament approves the private Bill which is currently in another place. Thereafter, progress can be made on crossrail and the Chelsea-Hackney line. I do not accept the criticism that, in our forward planning, we have neglected the needs of London Underground. The chairman has described his aspiration for what he describes as a decently modern metro. He and London Regional Transport are going to get just that.

Commuters come in from significant distances compared with other great European cities—indeed, 76 per cent. of all commuters coming into greater London come by rail or underground, compared with only 14 per cent. by car. As for British Rail, there is a major programme within Network SouthEast—more than £350 million last year, and I hope that a similar amount will be spent on investment purposes in this financial year. That includes re-equipping the Chiltern line and commencing the major work of re-equipping the inner Kent suburban commuter lines.

This morning, I visited Liverpool Street station and saw for myself the tremendous improvements and the resignalling project which has brought great benefits to the number of trains which can enter that rather constricted space.

The hon. Members for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) and for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) referred to buses, as did the hon. Member for Tooting. However, I could deal briefly with South Yorkshire. I share the concern of the hon. Member for Don Valley about falling patronage. When I was in Sheffield quite recently, I inquired about the reasons for the fall over the past 12 months—about 10 per cent., which is very disappointing, but it was in a period well past deregulation and when fares had not risen substantially. One of the main reasons for that is the marked preference of the people of South Yorkshire to own their own motor cars.

Mr. Redmond: I do not mislead the Minister. The public of South Yorkshire, in particular Doncaster, are highly dissatisfied following the deregulation of buses. There are multiple fares within Doncaster chasing a diminishing number of passengers. Because the companies want the most profitable routes, other areas invariably have to suffer. For weeks, a group of old-age pensioners in my patch of Edlington were without a bus service because the private bus company would not operate it and, due to the financial restrictions placed on South Yorkshire Passenger Transport, it obviously did not want it. Thankfully, South Yorkshire Passengers are coming to rectify the situation, but unless positive action is taken, there will be further deterioration—more cars and more pollution.

Mr. Freeman: It is a perfectly fair point that the price of competition is, in some cases, not necessarily disruption of services but change in services. Competition can mean the concentration of private sector companies on routes that they believe to be the most profitable. That is why it is important that local authorities, and in London the London Bus Executive, should subsidise routes that are socially necessary and are not provided by the operators. In Greater London, when we introduce our Bill in the next Parliament, we shall make provision for significant subsidies by the taxpayer, not the community charge payer, for socially necessary routes.

I was saying that, in South Yorkshire one of the main reasons for the recent fall in patronage has been the desire of local people to own their own motor cars, which is one reason why the Government have strongly supported supertram, which is another way of trying to capture people away from the motor car and back on to public transport.

The hon. Member for Newham, South referred to travelcards. I assure the hon. Gentleman that travelcard and similar schemes are extremely valuable, not only in London but in other great metropolitan areas such as Newcastle, the west midlands, and Greater Manchester,

[Mr. Freeman]

where I recently talked to the passenger transport authority about how to preserve, upon a sale of its municipally owned bus company, an all-bus operator card. There is no evidence that a travelcard will not thrive in London following deregulation. We shall strive to ensure that it does so. There is no evidence that the hon. Gentleman can cite from anywhere outside London of the death of such all-bus operator or multi-mode travelcards.

We have no intention of jeopardising the concessionary fares scheme. Indeed, as the hon. Member for Newham, South will know, we propose to legislate for the automatic roll-over of a scheme that applied in the previous year into a year when there is no agreement between all the London boroughs on a particular scheme. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is important to ensure that such a scheme is pan-London, applying to all the boroughs. That is because many bus routes operate through several boroughs. It is important not to fragment the operation of the concessionary fares scheme within London.

Mr. Spearing: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Freeman: I have only one minute left, so I wish to conclude.

The hon. Member for Newham, South also mentioned subsidies. I have already repeated the Government's assurance that subsidies for socially necessary routes will continue in a deregulated environment in greater London. The reason for deregulation is simple. It is to enable other bus companies to introduce additional services in greater London—initially, we believe, in the outer suburbs. We think that that will be of advantage to Londoners, because they will have more bus services to choose from. Although there might be some initial disruption of services, I do not accept that in the long run it will mean fewer buses operating.

Our policy on roads is clear. We have introduced up to 300 miles of new red routes in London to speed the flow of buses. The House will know that I recently announced Government assistance for bus priority measures not only in greater London but throughout the country. I hope that we shall have further announcements to make in the coming months. For greater London, we shall also study the applicability of road pricing.

The hon. Member for Tooting suggests an authority for Greater London, but no money. His colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench can offer not a penny more for public transport in London. We have a good development record, and we believe in a co-ordinated transport policy and priority for public transport.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Tuesday 18 February 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

General Practitioner Fund Holders

1. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the system of general practitioner fund-holding is progressing.

14. **Mr. Andy Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the operation of the general practitioner fund-holding initiative.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. William Waldegrave): It is clear that the first year of the scheme has brought a wide range of benefits to patients, and that has been confirmed by independent evaluation by Professor Glennerster at the London school of economics.

Mr. Mitchell: Has my right hon. Friend had a chance to reflect on the excellent report produced by Professor Glennerster and published by the King's Fund, which shows that fund-holding practices are more effective and efficient in delivering health care to patients, and that they use their resources much better? Could not he have arranged for that report to be leaked to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), because that might have prevented the hon. Gentleman from making the foolish pledge that Labour will abolish the excellent reforms?

Mr. Waldegrave: I do not know whether the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) likes to read things published in the normal way. If he had read the report, he would have found in it powerful evidence that his partisan ideological commitment to abolish the scheme is foolish. Professor Glennerster says that his research shows that none of the alleged scares about the scheme could be found to be true. He quotes Professor Maynard, who makes the basic point that decisions made closer to the consumer are more likely to reflect consumer information and preferences than an overall average view taken in a district planner's office. That is the strength of the GP fund-holding scheme.

Mr. Andy Stewart: Has my right hon. Friend noticed the success of GP fund holding in Nottinghamshire and the benefits that has brought to patients and the national health service alike? Does he agree that there is pressure to extend the excellent scheme and not—as suggested by the would-be Secretary of State for Health for Scotland—to abolish it?

Mr. Waldegrave: I believe that there are four excellent fund holding practices in my hon. Friend's neighbourhood, and they have been adding to the region's total health care provision and are bringing new services to patients. I am under pressure from a wide range of general practitioners to bring the list size criterion down and to extend the range of care that can be purchased by GP fund holders. I am considering both points.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is not the Secretary of State being slightly selective in the parts of the report that he uses? Is it not clear that it is an untried system, which is clearly producing a two-tier system for many patients, who are not receiving the very best care because their GP practices are treated as inferior to those that hold contracts?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Lady selects the wrong argument on which to call Professor Glennerster as witness, because he says that that argument is muddled. He shows clearly that he did not find evidence of the so-called two-tier phenomenon to which the hon. Lady refers, but that the total of care provided was increased. That benefits all patients because it takes the pressure off out-patient departments.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Is it not true that patients are refused access to services on financial grounds by GPs who are fund holders? May I draw to the attention of the Secretary of State the case of a Wakefield man who was refused expensive injections for infertility by a fund-holding GP and told to apply for that treatment to a non fund-holding practice in Wakefield?

May I also draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to the personal circumstances of a friend whose wife is suffering from serious cancer? She was advised that she could not receive homoeopathic treatment because the fund-holding practice had no appropriate contract. Has not the experiment proved a disaster for vast numbers of national health service patients?

Mr. Waldegrave: As always with selective, individual cases, there is more to them than meets the eye. I know a great deal about the difficulty of getting homoeopathic treatments referred by general practitioners because there is a homoeopathic hospital in my constituency. It is not a matter of fund holders versus non fund holders. There are a number of general practitioners who do not approve of such treatment.

Professor Glennerster considered carefully the argument that expensive treatments might be refused by fund holders and found no evidence of that yet. We fund the budgets on the basis of past practice so there is no reason for that to be so. I suspect that when we inquire into the matter, we shall find that the general practitioner had doubts about the treatment's clinical appropriateness.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Although my hon. Friend is right to say that budget-holding practices have been outstandingly successful and are now very popular with most doctors——

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the whole House wants to hear.

Mr. Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend, who is undoubtedly committed to improving health care, agree that the reforms make planning and the provision of

supra-regional specialties very much more difficult? Will he ensure—and give me an assurance—that there will be careful monitoring?

Mr. Waldegrave: I warmly endorse—of course—the first two parts of my hon. Friend's question, but I do not accept that his criticisms are well founded. Planning is based on good information and the internal market provides better information about GP, district and patient preferences. They can then be planned for.

Those working at a supra-regional and regional level believe that once the services that they can make available are known more widely, money will follow the patients to them.

Mr. Robin Cook: I remind the Secretary of State that last month he claimed that the majority of GPs supported him on fund holding. Is he aware that the very next week, a poll of GPs showed that they believe, by a massive majority of 65 per cent. to 15 per cent., that his reforms are damaging the NHS? Is that what he calls majority support?

Is the Secretary of State aware that last week in North Tyneside, 53 operations were cancelled, whereas operations on four other paticnts from fund holders went ahead? Is he aware that in Bath, all cataract operations have been cancelled except for those involving the patients of fund holders and that in Norwich, the patients of fund holders are jumping the waiting list and entering private wards? I call that a two-tier service. Most GPs call it a two-tier service. It has no place in the NHS and the next Labour Government will end it.

Mr. Waldegrave: I notice from a recent survey that Labour has achieved 13 per cent. support among GPs, so it has some way to go in winning the argument. When the hon. Gentleman finally gave me a straight commitment across the Dispatch Box to abolish GP fund holding, I told him that he delivered the support of the majority of GPs by doing so. I believe that GPs, whether fund holders or not, recognise, like everyone else in the NHS, that Labour's plans to turn all the reforms upside down and to throw away all the gains that have been made in the past three years are the last thing that the service needs. The hon. Gentleman can commit no more money. All he can commit himself to is undoing everything that has been achieved in the past three years.

London Health Services

2. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the internal market as the mechanism to determine the future pattern of health services in London.

Mr. Waldegrave: Information derived from the national health service internal market on general practitioner and patient preferences and on comparative costs will help the service to plan sensibly for the future, in London as elsewhere.

Mr. Marshall: Is the Secretary of State prepared to recognise that the Government's reforms have added to the difficulties of health care provision in the capital? Will he confirm or deny that the Tomlinson inquiry is likely to show that two directly managed units and one trust are in serious trouble? May I beg him to stop making political capital out of the health of the citizens of the capital and concentrate on the real issues?

Mr. Waldegrave: Putting around scares such as that, which have no foundation in fact, is the worst kind of playing politics with health. The Government were the first to undertake the far too long postponed replanning of services in London. That was why I appointed Sir Bernard Tomlinson. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman, who cares about these things, would welcome that. It goes as far back as to when Lord Ennals was Secretary of State. All those years ago he knew things and said that services should be replanned in London, but did nothing whatever about it.

Mr. Michael Morris: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the need for a review in London goes back much further than Lord Ennals? My right hon. Friend's agreement to such a review and initiative is greatly to be welcomed. Will he ensure that in the review by Sir Bernard Tomlinson, the key point about London—its specialist abilities serving constituencies such as mine in Northampton—remains a focal point? I visited the neurology department at the Middlesex hospital this morning. Such services, which are available to my constituents and others elsewhere in the country, are vital for the future of our health service.

Mr. Waldegrave: I agree with my hon. Friend. Many people within those marvellous specialist services in London believe that attracting patients from around the country, and the money that will come with them as the reforms develop, will strengthen those outstanding services. For example, many people at the Royal Brompton and National Heart hospital tell me that some of the special health authorities should be allowed to win new patients and the money that comes with them by being allowed to work in the internal market. There is no contradiction between paying tribute to those specialist services in London and pressing ahead with the reforms.

Ms. Harman: The Secretary of State said that the internal market was sensible. Does he regard as sensible the position revealed by Graham Jackson, the cardiologist at Guy's opted-out hospital, where local people are unable to be treated because the local district health authority's contract has run out? Local people are left waiting while less urgent cases from outside the district are treated because they bring money in with them. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that six local people have had to go private to avoid waiting and 40 remain on the waiting list with no prospect of being considered until the next financial year? One person has already died. Is not this a case of your money or your life in the internal market?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am glad that the Labour party second-rate advertising agency is now writing the hon. Lady's interventions in the House. The old system to which the hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) wish to return us was far more unsatisfactory, as she well knows. Under that system budgets were given to hospitals. They ran out two thirds of the way through the year. As the hon. Member for Livingston can promise his hon. Friends nothing about money, he could not prevent that from happening if he returned to the old system. We are moving to a system in which patients are accompanied by the money to finance their treatment. That is far more sensible.

Organ Donor Cards

3. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department has taken over the last 12 months to promote the carrying of organ transplant donor cards; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): The Department maintains a continuous campaign to promote the carrying of donor cards.

Mr. Wallace: Is the availability of donor organs more of a limitation on the transplant programme than the availability of resources? Will there come a time when that might become so acute that the Minister would be prepared to consider an opt-out as opposed to an opt-in donor system? How much money has been spent in the past year on promoting the donor card, compared with that spent on the more partisan promotional material which the Government have put out on their other health policies?

Mr. Dorrell: We distributed more than 10 million donor cards in the past 12 months. For a long time we have made it clear that the largest restriction on the growth of the transplant programme is the availability of donated organs, although it is not a restriction which has stopped the programme in its tracks. I remind the House that 33 kidney transplants per week are now completed, compared with 16 per week in 1979, and that there are now six heart transplants and seven liver transplants every week —a total transplant programme of 46 operations every week of the year. The programme is going well, but needs to go better. The best way to further enhance it is for every citizen to carry a donor card and to ensure that their families are aware of their view that their organs should be available for transplantation after their death.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: Does my hon. Friend agree that only about 60 per cent. of potential donors have organs retrieved from them? Does he agree that that is partly due to the failure of some consultants to seek organs on every possible occasion and also to the reluctance of some next of kin of potential organ donors to give their consent? In those circumstances does he think that there is a place for a new organ donor card, which has to be countersigned by next of kin? Will he consider a much stronger publicity campaign for organ donation?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is known to the House to be a great expert on this issue. He is right to say that a significant number of organs, which could be used for transplantation, are not used. We are conducting some research to establish the full range of reasons why that is so. We are specifically considering the proposal that the donor card should be countersigned. I am much more sympathetic to that proposal than I am to the opt-out proposal advanced by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace).

National Health Service Provider Units

4. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the financial position of provider units in the NHS.

Mr. Waldegrave: At the end of the third quarter, provider units remained on course to achieve a financial balance this year, as we had reported earlier at the end of the second quarter.

Mr. Eadie: Does the right hon. Gentleman deny that there was an attempt to cover up the fact that many of those units are in serious financial difficulties? Since the matter is in the public domain, as a consequence of information from his Department reaching the public which was not intended to reach them, how does he propose to deal with the matter? What proposals has he to put before the House this afternoon?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman is heading towards a vulnerable area for the Opposition. I advise him not to embarrass his hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) in that way. The national health service is greatly improved, in that for many years—including those years when the Labour party was running, or reported to be running the country—the financial balance of the service was poor. This year we have treated many more patients than previously and the service is in financial balance. The leaked document showed only the most commonsense action by the NHS management executive to monitor those hospitals where there are problems. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that that is odd it merely shows that, in common with the hon. Member for Livingston, he has had no experience of such matters.

Mr. Hayes: Has my right hon. Friend had the opportunity to read the scandalously deceitful national health service trust ballot which was put through my constituents' letter boxes by Labour-controlled Harlow council—at an expense to the charge payers of £25,000? Is my right hon. Friend at all surprised that the local health authority wants nothing to do with that document because it is pure Labour party propaganda and a cynical manipulation of the elderly and the frail? Will Labour stop at nothing to grab a few cheap jokes?

Mr. Waldegrave: I had the opportunity to study the document because my hon. Friend drew it to my attention as we came into the Chamber. It is a classic example of the waste of local taxpayers' money by a foolish council which would do much better to spend the money on the services for which it is statutorily responsible.

Mr. Robin Cook: How does the Secretary of State square his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) that provider units are in balance with the evidence from the document, which he knows well, that 86 hospitals are in deficit? Many of them face major cuts to balance at the end of the year and one of them has dangerously low nursing levels. How many hospitals, such as Watford, have big deficits? How many health authorities, such as Tunbridge Wells, cannot pay for routine operations and how many district health authorities, such as South Birmingham, cannot pay any more bills until April? Is the reason that the Secretary of State objects to the leak that the document tells the truth about those hospitals and exposes his cover-up?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman is a bit confused. If 86 hospitals have some problems, it means that another 500 do not. Some of those 500 are in surplus and, as the

health service is a unified service, those surpluses can be transferred to deal with the problems. There is nothing astonishing about that.

Eye Tests

5. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has monitored the extent to which people over 60 years are having their eyes examined since 1989 compared with previous years; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): Surveys carried out by the optical profession show that after an initial drop, 12·43 million sight tests were carried out in the financial year ending 1991. This exceeds the 12·21 million sight tests in 1987—the last typical year before the changes to the system were announced.

Mr. Alexander: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those figures, which I shall study carefully. In view of the fact that eye testing is important in picking up illness in the elderly and that we are in the business of preventive medicine rather than treating illnesses when they occur, will my hon. Friend keep an open mind? Should the figures for the number of eye tests show an adverse trend compared with those of the past, will my hon. Friend consider the possibility of reintroducing free eye testing for the over-60s?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is right to emphasise the importance of prevention. That is why the work of general practitioners is important in terms of the regular checks that they carry out on their patients, in particular those patients aged over 75. I can tell my hon. Friend that four out of five of those elderly patients have accepted their check-ups and that nine out of 10 found them useful.

For 40 years the policy has been that some contribution should be made towards the cost of sight and dental charges—that was agreed by both parties. People pay 13p a week towards the cost of a sight test every two years —less than the cost of a second-class stamp.

Mr. Kennedy: Is the Minister's very carefully worded reply an attempt to distract from the fact that the proportion of the elderly in the population is increasing and will continue to do so? Therefore, the potential demand for eye tests from the over-60s will increase exponentially. We have received clear evidence from opticians in our constituencies that the imposition of charges runs contrary to the concept of preventive medicine. That move was further encouraged by the increases in prescription charges last week, which were above average when set against inflation. Should not the costs of check-up tests and the associated costs be scrapped?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman, when discussing the increase in prescription charges, did not, of course, mention the above-average increase in optical vouchers —a 9·5 per cent. increase. As the population becomes older, it also becomes wealthier and I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that the average pensioner has increased his or her income by 33 per cent. That contrasts with the time when Labour was in power when pensioners' incomes increased by a modest 3 per cent.

The importance of prevention has been emphasised time and again. That is why, only last year, we were involved in the eye awareness campaign with the profession to draw attention to the importance of people ensuring that their eyesight is checked.

Dame Jill Knight: Is my hon. Friend aware that there was a serious fall-off in the number of people presenting themselves for eye tests for a considerable period after the charges were introduced and that the current figures show that we have not yet made up that gap? If that is not so, why have so many ophthalmologists gone out of business?

Mrs. Bottomley: I regret that I disagree with my hon. Friend, but I assure her that the levels have returned to those of 1987. That is agreed by the professions, with which I shall be having further discussion shortly. It is important to note that we have greatly increased the number of professionals providing services on a wide range of fronts. For example, there are an extra 22 per cent. ophthalmologists and an extra 22 per cent. optometrists registered with family health service authorities over and above the 1979 figure. They are all providing an excellent service. I am also pleased to inform my hon. Friend that ophthalmology waiting lists have fallen substantially during the past year.

Mr. James Lamond: Is the Minister aware that the number of eye tests in the Oldham area dropped by one third last year? Is he aware that even when people are examined, are found to have cataracts and wait a long time for the operation, some of them—such as a 91-year-old constituent of mine—are told that Royal Oldham hospital, which has been granted trust status, does not have the money to provide the necessary medicines and has money to help only the elderly?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am extremely surprised to hear what the hon. Gentleman says, for opthalmology waiting lists between March 1990 and March 1991 almost halved for long waiters. There is in the patients charter a clear commitment that patients should be seen within a maximum of two years. I shall look into the circumstances that the hon. Gentleman describes. Free NHS sight tests are available to those on low incomes, children and those especially at risk of eye disease, such as glaucoma sufferers. About 40 per cent. of people are entitled to free tests.

General Practioner Targets

6. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of general practitioners in Redbridge are reaching the 80 per cent. target for immunisation and cervical smears; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: On 1 April 1991, 65 per cent. of GPs in Redbridge and Waltham Forest were entitled to receive target payments for childhood immunisation, compared with 52 per cent. 12 months earlier. On the same date, 75 per cent. of local GPs were entitled to receive target payments for cytology, compared with 42 per cent. in the previous year.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Is my hon. Friend aware that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and I have something in common? Although I do not share the hon. Gentleman's rather seedy taste for handling stolen goods,

I did believe, as did he, that the 80 per cent. targets were too heroic and would never be reached. I was wrong, and they have been a dramatic success. Will my hon. Friend call on the hon. Member for Livingston to make a similar admission of the error of his ways?

Mr. Dorrell: I congratulate my hon. Friend on accurately quoting the words of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) on 25 July 1989, when he described the targets as

"so heroic . . . that many doctors will . . . give up trying."
—[*Official Report*, 25 July 1989; Vol. 157, c. 910.]

Far from giving up trying, doctors are meeting the targets. I have further bad news for the hon. Member for Livingston. He may remember that at about this time last year we published a series of figures which demonstrated that his predictions were wrong. He will not have long to wait for another diet of his own words.

Doctors' Contracts

8. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he next intends to discuss doctors' contracts with the British Medical Association; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Ministers meet BMA representatives regularly to discuss a range of issues.

Mr. Adley: In view of the evaporation of the objections of the BMA and a large number of doctors to the Government's policy, does my hon. Friend agree that the debate is being drawn up along the following lines, with the Confederation of Health Service Employees, the National Union of Public Employees and the Labour party on one side and the Government, the taxpayers and the patients on the other? My hon. Friend is aware that junior hospital doctors' hours have been a matter of concern for many years. Will she do more to publicise the results of the recent negotiations on that issue?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is right to say that the Labour party is increasingly losing credibility with patients, the public and the NHS staff because we are seeing concrete achievements by the NHS as the reforms work out in practice. We frequently talk with the BMA about junior doctors' hours. We have agreed to a new deal, with £60 million extra going in to tackle the problems of junior doctors and 500 extra staff. Moreover, we have agreed in full to the pay review body's recommendations on how to fund the doctors' new contracts. Shortly, we shall launch a further information campaign because, to achieve the changes in junior doctors' hours, it is important that the NHS task forces in each region can work with the juniors, managers and consultants to find practical solutions at their particular places of work. We believe that we have seen the end of that problem. We must complete that process.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Does the Minister realise that there is great disquiet among doctors about the slow implementation of an improvement in their hours and conditions? In that context, will she look at the pooling system that applies to GP contracts, because many GPs have improved their work in terms of cervical smears and other tests in preventive medicine, but have ended up worse off as a result?

Mrs. Bottomley: The number of hours a week worked by juniors has come down by about 10 hours since the Labour party was in power. In the past year, the number of those contracted to be on duty for more than 83 hours has halved, but we must go much further. Above all, we must move junior doctors on to a shift system so that they do not work more than 60 hours, coming down to 56 hours in the most intensive posts. We now have an agreement from all those concerned—the colleges, consultants, juniors and the health service—and we must find practical arrangements in each working unit to complete the task.

Princess of Wales Hospital, Ely

9. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress towards obtaining the use for the NHS of the premises of the RAF Princess of Wales hospital, Ely.

Mr. Dorrell: I am pleased to tell the House that Cambridgeshire health authority and the Ministry of Defence have agreed in principle that the health authority should buy the RAF hospital at Ely. The health authority and the Defence Land Agent hope to conclude negotiations within a month.

Mr. Paice: For my constituents in Ely and the surrounding area, it will be excellent news that, after 52 years as part of the RAF, the hospital has a future as part of the NHS. Will my hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the sterling work done by the Action Committee for a Hospital in Ely and Cambridge health authority, which persevered in trying to get the hospital for the NHS? Can he give the House any information about how it has been possible for the NHS, which is supposedly starved of funds, to find the money to buy that hospital?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that the further substantial increase in the NHS's capital budget in the next financial year has made it possible for the health authority and the Ministry of Defence to come to an agreement on that issue. I am glad to join my hon. Friend in congratulating those local people who have argued the strong case for ensuring that the hospital facilities at that building continue to be provided to the people of Ely. I welcome the fact that it is part of a continuing development of community hospital and community health facilities within the modern national health service.

NHS Treatment

10. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what remedies are available to NHS patients or their families to use if they are dissatisfied with the treatment given in NHS hospitals.

Mr. Dorrell: Directions issued under the Hospital Complaints Procedures Act 1985 require all NHS hospitals to make formal arrangements for dealing with complaints and for publicising those arrangements. Under the patients charter, NHS complaints procedures will be extended to all hospitals in which NHS patients receive care.

Mr. Hughes: May we have an urgent inquiry into why, over the past three years, the number of complaints against the health service in Lewisham and North Southwark has

gone up by 100 per cent., why there have been 30 complaints already this year and why serious complaints of maladministration and negligence have been made against Guy's, King's College and St. Thomas's hospitals by my constituents over the past year? Why, even when complaints are made, are they often inadequately dealt with, why is there no compensation and why do people sometimes hear nothing for far too long?

Mr. Dorrell: The increase in complaints may have something to do with the fact that we believe that it is important that if someone has not received the care to which he thinks he is entitled from the NHS, his right to complain should not be a well-kept secret, as has too often happened in the past. A patient's attention should be drawn to the fact that he has a right to complain and we have taken steps to do so. We take each complaint seriously and seek to ensure that every one is properly examined. I look forward to hearing from the hon. Gentleman how he will deal with the complaints that I expect he will receive from his constituents, when he has to explain to those employed at Guy's hospital why the Labour party's policies would deny that hospital the opportunity to increase staff pay by £6 a week.

Sir John Hannam: Will my hon. Friend accept the thanks of the House for the award of compensation to those patients who contracted HIV as a result of blood transfusions in the NHS? Will he pass on the thanks of those of us who went to see the Prime Minister two weeks ago to ask for his help in the matter?

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. We concluded, after long and careful thought, that it was right to make the change that we announced earlier this week.

Mr. Ashley: Is the Minister aware that medical accidents constitute a major cause of dissatisfaction? The legal procedure is far too clumsy and hit-and-miss. Cannot we have a proper system of no-fault payments for medical injuries?

Mr. Dorrell: The House debated the issue about a year ago and reached the conclusion, on a free vote, that that issue was not the highest priority call on the NHS budget. I agree with that decision and would not commend any proposal to change it.

Waiting Lists

11. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many in-patients are waiting for longer than a year for treatment; and what was the corresponding figure for 1979.

Mr. Waldegrave: At March 1979 the number of in-patients waiting over one year was 185,195. Provisional figures show that by December 1991 the number had fallen to 108,982, a reduction of 41 per cent.

Mr. Franks: Those figures are welcome, as is the 60 per cent. reduction in the northern region of those having to wait more than two years. Is not the essential difference between Government policies and those of the Opposition that the Government's prime concern lies with patients' interests, while Opposition Members' prime concern is to keep happy the unions that pay and sponsor them?

Mr. Waldegrave: I fear that on health, as on other issues, that is all too true. I think that the House will unite in applauding the fall in long waits. Our congratulations should go out from the House to the national health service for what it is achieving.

Mrs. Heal: The policies of the Secretary of State have meant that patients who have waited too long find the lists abolished, as happened to the varicose veins list at Whipps Cross hospital. As South East Staffordshire health authority has drawn attention to the longest waiters— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: I did not hear the intervention, but hon. Members should keep quiet.

Mrs. Heal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As South East Staffordshire health authority has said, attention to the longest waiters

"does not equate to attention to clinical priorities."

Is the Secretary of State more concerned with patients on waiting lists or with headlines on waiting lists?

Mr. Waldegrave: Like the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the hon. Lady leads for the Labour party in a weak suit. It is not just long waits that are falling. As she probably knows, half of all patients are treated as emergency cases, half come from waiting lists. When the Labour party was in power, half of the remaining half—the other 25 per cent.—were admitted in, on average, eight weeks. We have reduced that period to five weeks, which means that millions of patients now wait for shorter periods than they did under a Labour Government.

We are told by *The Observer* that the hon. Member for Livingston is now running as part of a comic team with the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) —a wonderful pantomime horse—in seeking the job of the Leader of the Opposition. If the hon. Member for Livingston ever got into power, no doubt we would return to the longer waits that we experienced under the Labour Government.

National Health Service Trusts

12. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received from patients about NHS trusts; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I am delighted to report that a recent patient satisfaction survey showed that, of 901 patients consulted, 96 per cent. were either very satisfied or quite satisfied with the quality of service that they had received. The survey showed also that the majority, 92 per cent., felt that the service had improved or stayed the same.

Mr. Hind: Will my hon. Friend take time today to congratulate the doctors and staff at Ormskirk district general hospital who are second in the country in respect of their waiting list register, with 94 per cent. of patients operated on within three months of their names appearing on the register? The hospital, driven by the doctors themselves, is seeking trust status; I hope that my hon. Friend will consider its application sympathetically and support the hospital in every way that she can.

Mrs. Bottomley: I give my warmest congratulations to the staff at Ormskirk hospital, which I visited in November 1989 for the turf-cutting for a new £32 million project

which was a typical example of the 75 per cent. increase in capital spending that we have put into the service—unlike the cuts of the Labour party. The hospital has certainly achieved remarkable developments and was recently congratulated by the *Sunday Times* on its work in having achieved the second shortest general surgery waiting list.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Skinner: With only a few more bribing days left before the general election and in view of the fact that the House has been televised for more than two years, will the Prime Minister tell us whether he is prepared to take part in televised debates during the general election campaign with the Leader of the Opposition—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we hold televised debates in the House twice a week——

Hon. Members: Frit!

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Has my right hon. Friend had a chance to study the statement by the Bundesbank that Germany is now in recession and that it blames the fall in output in Germany on the world recession? Does not that nail the lie being put around that these circumstances are due not to world but to British recession?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend points out, the Bundesbank has said that the German economy is now in recession. That confirms the point that I have been making to the House for some time about the international slow-down and international difficulties. A number of countries are either in recession or experiencing a slow-down in activity. Germany, alas, is the latest country to reach a formal recession.

Mr. Kinnock: Would the Prime Minister confirm that today's figures show the biggest rise in long-term unemployment in 10 years, that 1·3 million people in Britain have been without work for more than six months and that 750,000 of those have been without work for more than a year? Against that background, does the Prime Minister still dare to say to those people and their families that their prolonged misery is a price well worth paying?

The Prime Minister: No one has said that, as the right hon. Gentleman well knows. This month's increase in the numbers unemployed for a year or more is certainly extremely unwelcome, but the long-term unemployment level is about half what it was five years ago and long-term unemployment among 18 to 24-year-olds is also half that level. Long-term unemployment among the over-50s has halved over the past four years. These figures are too high, but the only way to get them down permanently is to have the right structure of development in the economy: low inflation and stable exchange rates. That is what we are providing; there is no easy way.

Mr. Kinnock: But the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have said that this unemployment and recession are a price well worth paying. Can the Prime Minister really take any comfort from the fact that, bad as today's figures are, they are slightly less bad than they were in the last Tory slump? Is he really trying to convince the people of Britain, as they tried to do then, that policies of this kind provide a basis for sustained recovery and sustained growth? British unemployment is rising faster than unemployment in any country in the rest of the European Community. We have a huge increase in long-term unemployed, and more job losses are being announced every week. All this is taking place while the Prime Minister has had his present job and while he was Chancellor of the Exchequer. Is not it now obvious that Majorism is not working?

The Prime Minister: I repeat to the right hon. Gentleman that I have said no such thing, and neither in context has my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. As I said a moment ago, there is only one way to create long-term stable employment. The right hon. Gentleman implies that nothing is being done. I do not call halving inflation doing nothing. Last month it fell to just over 4 per cent. If that is doing nothing, what were the last Labour Government doing when inflation went up to 27 per cent?

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister cannot correct the record to the extent of pretending that both he and the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) have not said that today's conditions, with all their misery, are not a price well worth paying. That is the first point. Secondly, the Prime Minister refers to the record over 13 years. In that 13 years manufacturing output under his Government in Britain has gone up less than 6 per cent. It has gone up by four, five and 10 times as much among our competitors, and the right hon. Gentleman is still not doing anything to bring Britain out of recession, to give us recovery. A Tory Government means permanent high unemployment.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman does not listen and he does not understand. I repeat: I have said no such thing and I invite him to withdraw. The House will know that he changed his allegation between his first and third questions. If he is really concerned about unemployment, why does he want to cripple British industry by bringing back flying pickets, by encouraging mass pickets, by returning trade union immunities, with all the difficulties that we saw in the 1960s and 1970s? That would not produce growth and jobs. That would produce permanent slump, no jobs, no prospects, no hope for the future. Those are the policies that the right hon. Gentleman sets out before this nation.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend recognise that the decision to compensate those who contracted HIV as a result of treatment through the national health service is widely welcomed? I thank him for a speedy and compassionate response. He knows the representation that I made with other colleagues only a fortnight ago.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he says. We made special provision for those with haemophilia and HIV because of the special circumstances that are apparent and because of the widespread representations that have been made to us. I hope that it will ease the difficulties of people who face such a tragic circumstance.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Prime Minister realise that there are only two facts that one needs to know to assess the Government's real commitment to recovery? The first is that unemployment rose by 53,000 last Thursday and the second is that the Government cut their training budget by £171 million last Friday. How does the Prime Minister justify that?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is well aware that we have the largest training provision that this country has ever seen. If the right hon. Gentleman does not know what circumstances are necessary for long-term prosperity and jobs, and that they are basically low inflation and a stable economy, he ought to learn that speedily.

Mr. Gorst: When my right hon. Friend is making arrangements for his business in the second week in April, will he please include a visit to Edgware general hospital, where he will find patients, members of staff and doctors highly satisfied with the changes that have taken place in the national health service?

The Prime Minister: I shall be happy to visit that hospital. I think that the changes in the health service are increasingly being understood to be welcome and to be providing a better health service for the future. That is becoming increasingly understood within the health service—if not, alas, on the Opposition Benches.

Q2. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Patchett: The Government have increased prescription charges 14 times, and they did so just this week by twice the rate of inflation. Will the Prime Minister intervene to stop this disgraceful taxation of the sick—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: There are 100 million more free prescriptions this year than there were at the time of the last Labour Government. The number of people who pay for prescriptions has shrunk and shrunk, as the hon. Gentleman knows. He should stop trying to misrepresent policies.

Q3. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Amess: Will my right hon. Friend agree to visit Basildon—*[Interruption.]*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Come on.

Mr. Amess: —the finest and most exciting town in the country? When my right hon. Friend does so, will he tell my constituents that there has been a record reduction in the number of strikes and that we now have the best figures for decades? Does he agree that such improvements are a key component in a strong economy and that they have been achieved through the Government's industrial relations laws, which the Opposition parties wish to repeal?

The Prime Minister: I shall be happy to visit my hon. Friend at Basildon either before or after the general election. He makes a good point. Indeed, the figures for 1991 are even better than those for 1990. There were fewer strikes last year than in any year since records began a century ago. That is essentially because of the change in labour relations and the encouragement that has been given for employers and the work force to work together.

Q4. **Mr. John Garrett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Garrett: Has the Prime Minister seen the prospectus from Pathfinders Repossessions plc, which is a company which proposes to buy repossessed homes at auction and then flog them off or rent them at a huge profit? I understand from the promoters that the project cannot fail because it qualifies for tax reliefs under the business expansion scheme. Does the Prime Minister find this proposition just plain squalid?

The Prime Minister: The straight answer to the hon. Gentleman is no, I have not seen that prospectus. If the hon. Gentleman had wanted a detailed comment on it, he would have invited me to look at it before he asked his question. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Oppenheim: Has my right hon. Friend had the chance to study the document entitled "The Citizen's Charter", which was written in 1921 by Herbert Morrison, then secretary of the London Labour party? It states that the best way to improve public services is to increase competition. Does not that show that no amount of tacky red plastic roses, sharp suits and slick public relations can disguise the fact that, far from progressing, Labour is regressing?

The Prime Minister: I believe that it does show that. My hon. Friend is entirely right about the merits of competition. We now have another citizens charter that addresses the direct problems faced by the people of this country. The Opposition are so rattled about it that NALGO is spending £2 million to advertise against it.

Q5. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Mahon: The Prime Minister does not seem to be aware of what is happening with prescription charges. May I draw to his attention the case of a constituent of mine, a Mr. Russell, who is paid just 6p more than the income support level? From 1 April, he will have to pay £3·75 a week for a prescription out of an income of £60·31. If that is not a tax on the sick, will the Prime Minister tell us what it is?

The Prime Minister: One in three people are now entitled to free prescriptions, as opposed to one in six.

There are far more prescriptions than ever before for which people no longer pay, and those who find themselves marginally above income support level have the option of acquiring a season ticket precisely to meet that problem.

Q6. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Moate: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act is an essential weapon in the battle against terrorism? Does he agree that all parties in the House should support its annual renewal, so that we can send the terrorists the clear message that they can never win?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Sir—and I believe that recent events reinforce that point. Without the renewal of the Act, the IRA would be free to march, recruit and raise funds anywhere in Great Britain. Its renewal is absolutely essential, not just as a clear message to the terrorists but as a vital part of our ability to safeguard the lives of our citizens. I hope that, in the light of all that has happened, the Opposition will change their policy on this occasion, and will support the renewal of the Act.

Mr. Speaker: The motion in the name of Mr. John MacGregor. Not moved. I call Mr. Andrew F. Bennett.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Well, we have rather passed points of order.

Mr. Corbett: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister said in reply to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition that neither he nor the Chancellor had made the remark about unemployment being a price well worth paying. May I tell you and the House, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's point of order constitutes a clear continuation of Question Time. I am not responsible for what the Prime Minister has said.

Criminal Justice (Amendment) Bill

3.32 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to impose limits upon, and to make other provisions in respect of, the admissibility of an uncorroborated confession in evidence before a court; and for connected purposes.

The Bill would involve amending the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

When I was a young Member of Parliament, one of the campaigns that impressed me most was that of Christopher Price over the Confait case. Month after month, Mr. Price came to the House to demand justice for one of his constituents, who had been wrongly accused and convicted of an appalling murder. Eventually, as a result of the persistence of Mr. Price, pardons were granted in the cases concerned.

Having heard all the details, I was convinced that it was an essential safeguard for all interviews conducted in police stations to be tape-recorded. I strongly believe that, if tape recording were introduced, it would solve the problem that occurred in the Confait case and in other cases. I have therefore campaigned vigorously for the tape recording of evidence taken in police stations and I was delighted when the Government agreed to introduce such a measure into the Police and Criminal Evidence legislation. I understand that some Home Office Ministers think that interviews should be videoed rather than tape-recorded. There has been a big improvement as a result of tape recording, but I do not believe that it has totally resolved the problem.

Anyone who read the Adjournment debate of my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) on 12 December, dealing with the PC Salt case, will realise that tape recording is not the complete answer. In spite of the confessions being tape-recorded, we now know that the individuals involved were taken to a different police station and rehearsed—I think that is the word—in the way in which they should make their confessions, and then taken to another police station where they made the confessions. Therefore, although tape recording has made a considerable improvement, we have to go further.

The Confait case to which I referred at the beginning has turned out to be only the tip of the iceberg. In the Guildford Four case, the Birmingham Six case, the Bridgwater Farm case and a series of other cases, it has been demonstrated that the confessions which were put before the courts were unsatisfactory. We now know that, in the Judith Ward case, a confession is in considerable doubt. In Rochdale, the courts are considering the Stefan Kiszko case.

All those cases suggest that, on occasion, confessions have been obtained in an unsatisfactory manner and that, in some cases, people are prepared to confess to crimes which clearly they could not have committed. Therefore, it is dangerous for courts to rely merely on confession evidence.

If there are such miscarriages of justice, we suffer in three ways. First, someone is wrongfully imprisoned or punished, and that person and their family suffer grievously. Secondly, society suffers because, if the courts convict the wrong person, it means that someone else has got away with the crime. Thirdly, as a result of the publicity given to such cases, police, lawyers and judges are discredited, and the whole legal system suffers. There is evidence that, as a result of those cases, juries are less willing to accept what police and others say in court.

As I understand it, the Government accept that the position is unsatisfactory. That is why they set up the royal commission. Many of us have a cynical view of royal commissions; it seems that they are set up to delay difficult choices. By the time a royal commission has collected all the evidence, its recommendations have been considered by the Government and Parliament and legislation is introduced, three or four years may have passed, if it is done quickly, but it may be 10 years before action is taken.

I suggest a simple remedy: to apply the law in Scotland to England and Wales. That is the essence of what I propose. That has been proposed to the royal commission by Liberty, Amnesty International and a long list of other people and organisations, which I will not read out, but which includes my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South. Confessions should be made inadmissible in court cases unless they have been adopted in the presence of a lawyer or there is clear corroboration of the evidence put forward. It should also be inadmissible for confessions to be put in if there is any indication that they may have been obtained in oppressive circumstances.

I have heard one or two police officers claim that that would make their task harder. It does not appear to have made the task harder in Scotland, where the record on crime is at least as good as in England and Wales. Therefore, it appears that the Scottish police can cope well with that requirement. If they can cope with it, I do not see why the police in England and Wales should not be able to cope with it.

The other argument that has been put to me by police officers is that, if a solicitor is present when people make confessions, he will discourage a person from making a confession and will try to persuade that person to remain silent. I understand that all the studies that have taken place indicate that there is very little difference between the behaviour of a person volunteering to give a statement in the presence of a solicitor and the behaviour of a person volunteering to give a statement in the absence of a solicitor. Thus, I believe that the presence of a solicitor would give rise to no difficulties at all. In fact, it might even speed up justice, as the solicitor would know what the charges were and would not need such a detailed transcript of the tape recording.

This procedure would have the advantage of encouraging the police to go and collect evidence, rather than to put all their efforts into getting a confession. That might result in their being directed to the right person, rather than being left with a hunch and pressing for a confession.

The last point that I want to emphasise is that it is far too easy for us to assume that the problems that have occurred are the result of a few bent police officers, in some cases poor lawyers, and bigoted judges. I do not believe that that is so. I believe that, in respect of this matter, we are all guilty, because we have all applied pressure. Anyone who was in the House when the Guildford bombing or the Birmingham pub bombing was reported, or anyone who is aware of the details of a particular child murder, realises that there is a tremendous public demand for the conviction of the guilty person. That pressure is often acutely felt by the police officers. They are very closely involved, having seen the particular horror of the crime.

All those pressures exist, and Members of Parliament regularly demand a higher conviction rate. We want the police to succeed.

Against all those pressures, the legislature has a duty to provide the conditions that will prevent the police, or anyone else, from wanting to overstep the mark. That is why I believe that this Bill would improve justice in our society. In a civilised society it is better that, occasionally, a guilty person should escape than that an innocent person should be convicted. If we make sure that confessions are taken down in the presence of a solicitor, many of the problems will be solved. This legislation is long overdue.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. Chris Mullin, Mr. Chris Smith, Mr. Harry Cohen, Ms. Harriet Harman, Mr. Bernie Grant, Mr. Martin Redmond, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Richard Caborn, and Mr. Brian Sedgemore.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE [AMENDMENT]

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett accordingly presented a Bill to impose limits upon, and to make other provisions in respect of, the admissibility of an uncorroborated confession in evidence before a court; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 20 March and to be printed. [Bill 80.]

Points of Order

3.44 pm

Mr. Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: We have passed the stage for points of order.

Mr. Bowden: I beg your pardon, Mr. Speaker: I thought you had said that you wanted to have points of order taken after the ten-minute Bill.

Mr. Speaker: I normally take points of order before ten-minute Bills, but if there was a misunderstanding I shall take the hon. Member's point now.

Mr. Bowden: I seek your advice in respect of a rather difficult matter. You will recall that, on 14 February, we dealt with the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill. That Bill was defeated narrowly—by only 12 votes. On Monday 17 February, *The Times* carried an advertisement, placed by the International Fund for Animal Welfare. That advertisement named every Member of Parliament and indicated how each had voted. You will recall that I was a sponsor of the Bill. I am a vice-president of the League Against Cruel Sports, and in the advertisement I was recorded as having abstained in the Division. My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) was also recorded in that way, but we both voted for the Bill. We have been contacted by people saying that we betrayed their trust and the undertakings that we gave to our constituents. Can you, Sir, give me some advice?

Mr. Speaker: The survey was pretty inaccurate, because I also found my name on it as having abstained. My three deputies were also recorded as having abstained, so I am not sure that the public should place too much credence on such an advertisement. The hon. Gentleman has made his point, and I think that he should raise the issue with the organisation concerned.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have great sympathy with the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden) in this respect. It is a serious matter, especially for those of us who hold the cause as dear as we do. I was a Teller for that vote on the Bill and, of course, journalists being what they are, I was missed off the list in *The Guardian* as being absent. I have taken steps to remedy that omission if anyone cares to read today's "Diary" in *The Guardian*, but that is neither here nor there. I think that it would greatly assist some journalists who are perhaps not fully aware of our procedure if Tellers were recorded among those who vote for or against as our vote is taken by voice, before we move to count in the Division Lobbies. It is a serious matter, because we want people outside to know what Members of Parliament are doing, for and against strong arguments.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that we need to pursue this. The House knows—and I hope that, as a result of this, the country may know—that *Hansard* is the official report. What is recorded in *Hansard* is what matters, not what may be reported in the press.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a wholly different point of order, Mr. Speaker, but I suggest a far

[Mr. Tony Marlow]

more important one in the long term. In his question to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) asked about the health service in Norwich. The hon. Gentleman has it as one of his ambitions that the health service of Scotland —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot hear this. I stopped a member of the Opposition for seeking to continue Question Time. I saw the hon. Gentleman standing but, unhappily, I was not able to call him on that particular question. I suggest that he tries his luck on a future occasion, not under the guise of a point of order.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I know that this will be helpful.

Mr. Ewing: I wonder whether I could raise with you, Mr. Speaker, a matter which is very sensitive in the run-up to the general election. Without being critical of any of the House authorities, I am surprised at the contents of the Government motion on the Order Paper. You have always ruled, that the Government have no responsibility for Opposition parties' policies. The sensitive issue is the involvement of the civil service in, first, drafting the motion, because that seems to be a clear breach of the impartiality rules by which the British civil service is governed; and secondly, its briefing Ministers on the contents of this motion. There can be absolutely no doubt that the civil service has become embroiled in party politics in the drafting of the motion and in the briefing of Ministers.

Mr. Speaker: I have no knowledge of that at all. I am not responsible for the drafting of motions, as the hon. Gentleman well knows. There are lots of motions on the Order Paper on which I might express my opinion if I dared.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): This is one of them.

Mr. Speaker: No. I am specifically required never to give my reasons, and I do not intend to do so on this matter.

Industrial Relations

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

3.49 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move,

That this House congratulates Her Majesty's Government on its success in reforming industrial relations; recognises the importance of these reforms to the improvement in the underlying strength of the British economy; notes that the number of working days lost last year is provisionally estimated to have been the lowest total since records began in 1891; welcomes the Government's proposals to prevent abuse of union 'check-off' procedures and to give members of the public the right to seek protection of the law against unlawful industrial action in the public services; notes that the main Opposition party has refused to indicate whether it supports or opposes these proposals, despite frequent invitations to do so; recalls that it has opposed every stage of the Government's highly successful industrial reforms, and remains committed to reversing them; notes that it would put trade unions in a uniquely privileged legal position, giving them rights they did not have even in the mid-1970s; notes that it would allow the return of secondary action and flying pickets; notes that its other policies, particularly the minimum wage, would encourage industrial unrest; believes that its proposals would wreck the competitiveness of British industry by making it impossible for many British firms to deliver goods and provide services to their customers at the time when they are required; and further believes that its policies would destroy employment opportunities, threaten public services, and cause inward investors to take their investment and jobs elsewhere.

Last Thursday, the statistics on industrial relations for the calendar year 1991 were published. They showed that the number of days lost through strikes fell below the million mark, to 800,000. That was the lowest figure for a hundred years—the lowest, in fact, since records began.

In 1979, by contrast, more than 29 million working days were lost through industrial action. Some 3 million working days were lost in the single month of January alone. In that period, children were denied access to their schools, patients were denied access to their hospitals and the dead were denied access to their graves. That was the legacy of the previous Labour Government.

Last week, the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) criticised the fact that this debate was going to take place. He said:

"we should be talking about employment".

Nothing could more vividly show the depth of the hon. Gentleman's failure to understand how a free enterprise economy works, the depth of his inability to appreciate how a market economy operates and the depth of his ignorance of how private enterprise functions than that observation.

The truth is that the industrial relations reforms which this Government have introduced over the past 12 years and which have created the strike-free climate of industrial relations which we now enjoy have been crucial in improving the underlying strength of our economy over that time and are critical to our prospects for the future. The self-styled party of industry is as ignorant of the views of industry on this issue as it is on everything else.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): In the past year, how many days have been lost through unemployment?

Mr. Howard: Does the hon. Gentleman think that the way in which to improve the prospects for unemployement and for the creation of jobs is to go back to the industrial relations climate that his party and his Government bequeathed to this country? The hon. Gentleman should listen and learn. We look forward to hearing what he has to say in the debate.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): If the Minister cannot answer the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), can he answer this one? If we have had fewer strikes in the past year than has been the case for the past 50 years, who is responsible for the slump?

Mr. Howard: I should have thought that even the hon. Gentleman, having seen the figures from Germany, would now accept that there is a worldwide recession. Even the hon. Gentleman cannot think that we could be immune from that worldwide recession.

Opposition Members will not escape the views of industry on the important issue for debate today. The CBI's manufacturing advisory group, for example, has said that—thanks to the Government's reforms—

"employee communications and industrial relations have been transformed. The industrial relations turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s is now a distant memory".

The Institute of Directors has, in its words,

"supported the successful step-by-step reform of industrial relations over the past twelve years. We believe that the latest statistics on strike action . . . amply demonstrate the success of the policies which have been pursued".

The Invest in Britain Bureau found that 96 per cent. of foreign firms believed that British industrial relations had improved significantly in recent years. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has said:

"labour legislation has been introduced to modernise industrial relations".

These policies, it added,

"have had major effects on United Kingdom productivity and potential output performance".

A survey by the German Chambers of Commerce and Industry, published only last month, found that 91 per cent. of German firms operating in Britain regarded British industrial relations as being either "good" or "excellent". The same survey found that Britain is now the favourite location within the European Community for German overseas investment. Across the world as a whole, the United Kingdom is second only to the United States as the preferred location for German firms investing abroad.

Those two findings—on investment and industrial relations—are inextricably linked. Without the improvement in our industrial relations, that investment—and all the associated jobs—would undoubtedly have gone elsewhere. Instead of looking to leave Britain, as in the strike-prone seventies, inward investors are queuing up to come here.

Good industrial relations are essential if we are to continue attracting such a high proportion of inward investment from European Community and other countries. The importance of such inward investment should not be underestimated. A recent survey by the Nomura Research Institute showed that, over the next four years, Japanese investment in the United Kingdom would create 447,000 jobs, contribute £4 billion to our balance of trade and add 2 per cent. to our gross national product.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Howard: The Trades Union Congress regards that investment as "alien". Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is rising to defend that description by the TUC of inward investment.

Mr. Flannery: The right hon. and learned Gentleman will remember that, on 26 November last, I asked him how many unemployed were newly on the list throughout Europe and what percentage were in Britain. He refused to answer the question, even though it had come through the Table Office. The next day, he was asked the same question in the Employment Select Committee by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton). Again, he refused to give the figures, so my hon. Friend gave them. They revealed that, in Europe, 972,000 people were put on the unemployment list and that, of those, 777,000 were from Britain. That means that over 80 per cent. of unemployment in the whole of Europe came from Britain.

Mr. Howard: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could explain how any of that justifies the description by the TUC of Japanese inward investment as "alien", when such investment contributes so much to our economy, creates jobs and will remedy the evil about which the hon. Gentleman claims to be so worried.

Many right hon. and hon. Gentlemen on the Opposition Benches are sponsored by trade unions who voted for that resolution. Have they rushed forward to disassociate themselves from those views? Have they condemned the TUC for that resolution? Have they been keen to disown the dinosaurs of the trade union movement whose views are so damaging to the future of our country? Not a bit of it.

The Opposition spokesman on trade and industry, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), has been challenged time and time again to disassociate himself from that "alien" remark. So has the hon. Member for Sedgefield. On each occasion, they maintain a deafening silence. But perhaps the hon. Member for Sedgefield will prove willing at last today to speak up on the subject. Perhaps today he will utter a word of condemnation of the TUC in respect of that resolution. I will gladly give way to him if at last he can bring himself to commit himself to the faintest criticism of his TUC paymasters.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The Secretary of State tells us that all these companies from abroad have been investing in the United Kingdom. I have one in my constituency called Volvo Bus Company. It invested many millions of pounds. The minute that it was in trouble at home, it pulled out. Now it intends to export buses from Sweden to the United Kingdom, despite picking up an order on 7 February in Singapore for £12·5 million and picking up an order only a couple of months ago for £4·5 million from London Transport. It hid all those orders from the work force, because it did not want them to challenge the decision to close the plant.

How can we possibly rely on industry from overseas if firms which locate in the United Kingdom take that attitude when they get into trouble? We cannot trust them.

Mr. Howard: I wonder what point the hon. Gentleman seeks to make. Does he suggest that it would have been better if that company had never come to his constituency in the first place?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Yes.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman's constituents will mark well his attitude to inward investment. Does he suggest that we should turn our back on all inward investment in case at some future date the company changes its mind? Is that what the hon. Gentleman recommends for the future of our country?

The huge increase in inward investment is only one of the benefits that we have reaped from the transformation of our industrial relations in the past 12 years. Industrial peace has been crucial to our economic performance in terms of growth, productivity and overall investment.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Although we hear a great deal from Opposition Members about wanting to go back to the good old days when trade union bosses organised our industry, is it not true that members of trade unions have no desire to return to the old system, under which they lost control of their trade unions, but that they support the trade union legislation that we have introduced?

Mr. Howard: I agree. My hon. Friend is right, and that is reflected in the strike statistics. It is because union members have to be consulted that there are so few strikes and so few days lost as a result of industrial action.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): In case my right hon. and learned Friend did not hear it, there have been loutish sedentary interventions from the Opposition Front Bench. It has happened about six times. They have been saying, "Jobs, jobs, jobs." My right hon. and learned Friend is talking about investment from the Federal Republic of Germany. He will know that the boss of Mercedes Benz has said that Germany is about to export jobs because wages are too high and because of the curse that Delors and the social contract have imposed on the Germans. The Opposition want to introduce the curse of Delors to this country, with its socialist contract. They talk about jobs, but what impact would that have on jobs?

Mr. Howard: It would have a devastating impact on jobs, as would the range of policies advocated by the Labour party. My hon. Friend will know that Mercedes Benz announced—I think that it was last week—that it was likely to make 20,000 of its workers redundant, no doubt partly in response to the social costs and the burden which those costs impose on German industry.

The truth of the matter is that, after lagging behind other European Community countries in the 1960s and 1970s, the British economy grew faster than all of them, except Spain, during the 1980s, when our growth rate averaged more than 3 per cent. a year.

Business investment grew faster in the United Kingdom in the 1980s than in all other major industrial countries, except Japan. It rose by an unprecedented 45 per cent. in the three years to 1989. During the 1980s, manufacturing productivity increased at an annual rate of 4·7 per cent. —more than in any other major industrial country, including Japan.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that many firms in my constituency would have been adversely affected had the Prime Minister not succeeded in keeping us out of the social chapter at Maastricht? I went round a waste paper processing factory in my constituency last Friday. It is a continuous process, with only two days off a year—Christmas day and new year's day. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Workers work two 12-hour day shifts and two 12-hour night shifts and then have four days off. Staff like it that way and like the amount of time at home, employers like it that way, and the company is paying for and providing more jobs. Would it not have been a disaster if we had succumbed at Maastricht? They would not be allowed to make those arrangements, which thoroughly suit them.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend's experience is typical. Employer after employer has congratulated my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on the outcome of the Maastricht agreement. The alternative would have been truly disastrous for British industry, yet the Opposition seem totally oblivious to the consequences, which would have been deeply distressing to employers and employees and would have had devastating consequences for jobs —the word to which my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) drew attention, saying that it had been repeatedly mouthed in a 'loutish' manner by Opposition Members, from a sedentary position.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The Secretary of State has been telling us about the evils of trade unionism in the 1960s and 1970s and that so much has been done to improve the situation through legislation. How is it that, since 1979, under this Government, 2·5 million full-time jobs in manufacturing have disappeared, which is almost 36 jobs for every hour that the Government have been in office? Why have there been two major recessions, and why is this recession even worse than the last one in the early 1980s?

Mr. Howard: I find it difficult to believe that even the hon. Gentleman is not aware of the fact that employment in manufacturing has declined in this country since 1966, in common with almost every advanced industrial country. The difference between this Government's performance and that of the Labour party when it was in government is that, under us, manufacturing output, manufacturing exports and manufacturing productivity have increased. We have laid the base for the future of our manufacturing industry.

In the past two years—and for a third year when the figures become available—we have seen an increase in our share of the world trade in manufactured goods for the first time in decades. That is the truth about manufacturing industry.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax) *rose*——

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Lady still wishes to intervene, I shall give way.

Mrs. Mahon: The Minister will be aware of the details of what happened to the workers at Coloroll in my constituency, because we have exchanged letters on the subject. The workers were productive, but they were made redundant two years ago. Perhaps the Minister can tell me where in the glossy document there is anything to help that work force to obtain the redundancy payments that they were awarded at a tribunal 16 months ago.

Is it not time that the Minister put his own house in order and helped the staff in Manchester who are responsible for that case? They have told me that they are

having to work overtime and at weekends to deal with that case. The Minister denied that in a letter to me, but the staff have confirmed again to me that they cannot cope.

The workers at Coloroll have had to wait 16 months since the award was made—they still have not received their redundancy payment. Why does the Minister not sort that out instead of making a mess of other Departments?

Mr. Howard: We have increased the number of staff dealing with redundancy payments, and we are anxious to make those payments as quickly as possible. In the case that the hon. Lady has mentioned, it has been explained to her that there are particular complications, but we very much hope that the workers concerned will receive their payments as quickly as possible.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde) *rose*—

Mr. Howard: I must get on.

None of the improvements in our economic performance to which I have referred could have been secured without stable industrial relations and without a sharp fall in the number of strikes and working days lost because of strikes. Industrial relations peace is, always has been and always will be fundamental to economic recovery.

If there is one lesson that everyone should have learnt by now, it is that industrial peace cannot be achieved with an unbalanced framework of industrial relations law. The collapse of the previous Labour Government's economic policies in the winter of discontent was rooted in the trade union laws that they had introduced. Those laws gave trade unions greater privileges and fewer obligations than at any time in the history of this country.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is an amazing achievement to have the lowest level of strike days lost for a hundred years? There are two reasons for that. The first is the change in the law on trade unions which the Government have introduced in the past decade. The second is the programme of denationalisation, which has brought more competition and discipline to bear in our industrial sector.

In 1981, unemployment was considerably higher than it is now, but so were the number of days lost in strikes. The Labour party's idea that the unemployment level determines whether we have industrial peace is complete garbage.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is right. We have yet to hear that argument this afternoon, but no doubt it will be forthcoming.

Mr. Blair: Since the Minister announced employment action last June—an emergency programme to help the unemployed—at least another 300,000 people have become unemployed. Can the Minister tell us how many people are on employment action?

Mr. Howard: The figure is in excess of 10,000, and it is increasing by about 1,000 a week. When the hon. Gentleman succeeds in persuading the shadow Chief Secretary that a scheme such as that forms one of her two immediate spending priorities, we might listen more seriously to the hon. Gentleman on such matters, but not until then. The hon. Gentleman would do well to wait a while before he says anything else, as one or two questions may be put to him.

We do well to remind ourselves that, under Labour's legislation, trade unions enjoyed virtually unlimited protection for calling strikes and other industrial action. It did not matter how remote a strike was from the original dispute. It did not matter how many jobs and businesses were put at risk. It did not matter how much hardship was inflicted on the community as a whole. The only test of the lawfulness of a strike was whether a union official thought it would help to further his dispute.

It was as a result of those laws that flying pickets were free to spread disruption far and wide and unions were free to discipline and even expel any member who crossed a picket line or refused an instruction to strike. In the words of the then Attorney-General, the trade unions were free to practice "lawful intimidation" against their own members.

No wonder the world then believed that Britain's industrial relations problems were insoluble and that the descent into industrial chaos was inevitable. Our programme of trade union law reform showed that those who had written the British economy off as permanently crippled by strikes were wrong.

We set ourselves three objectives. The first was to safeguard the democratic rights of trade union members and to make union leaders accountable to their members. The second was to establish a fair balance of bargaining power. The third was to protect employees and employers alike against the abuse of industrial power.

As a result of our legislation, all employees have escaped the tyranny of the closed shop and are now free to decide for themselves whether or not to join a trade union. All union members have the right to vote in a secret ballot to elect their leaders and before they are called on to strike. All union members have the right to decide for themselves whether or not to strike, free from the threat of disciplinary action if they cross picket lines. Businesses and jobs are protected against the flying picket, against secondary action, against wildcat strkes and against all the other abuses of trade union power that so disfigured British industrial relations in the 1960s and 1970s.

Mr. Graham: Is the Minister aware that a young constituent of mine under the age of 21 was forced to work seven days a week and was told that, if he did not work the seven days, he would be fired? He was given £8 a day for working on Saturdays and Sundays. In other words, that young man has had all his rights taken away by the Conservatives. There is no one to whom he can turn for support. The Government have consigned millions of young folk to a life of poverty and a life without any say whatever.

Mr. Howard: I do not know the age of the hon. Gentleman's constituent.

Mr. Graham: He is nearly 21.

Mr. Howard: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman thinks that his constituent would be helped by the introduction of a national minimum wage, which would destroy the jobs that might be availabe for his constituent. The hon. Gentleman genuinely cannot see that those jobs would not be available.

Mr. Graham: My secretary worked for £2·45 an hour in the catering trade and was obliged to work all the hours of the day. The Minister's daughter or wife would never think of working such damned hours for that sort of money.

Mr. Howard: The figures show how wrong the hon. Gentleman is. They show that the introduction of a minimum wage would benefit the richest 30 per cent. of the population by more than it would the poorest 30 per cent. The figures show how many miles away is the hon. Gentleman's understanding of the issues involved.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Howard: Labour Members sometimes try to pretend that they would have achieved all that we have achieved as a result of our reforms and that they would have put our reforms on the statute book. Indeed, they sometimes give the impression that almost as much credit is due to them as to the Government for the transformation that has occurred in our industrial relations.

The Labour party has opposed every trade union Bill that we have put before the House. It campaigned in the 1983 and 1987 general elections on a promise to repeal each and every one of our reforms, and it has continued to promise wholesale repeal.

In April 1988, the Leader of the Opposition, with uncharacteristic succinctness, said of our legislation that his commitment was "to clear it". In 1990, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) said:

"It's going to repeal all of it, there's no little bits you can keep of it. There's nothing you can keep of this legislation . . . It all has to go."

When the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East made that admirably clear statement, he was doing no more than echo the words of the current shadow Chancellor and current Labour Front-Bench employment spokesman in the debates on the 1984 Act. Both the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) and the hon. Member for Sedgefield made clear their implacable opposition to strike ballots.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman described that measure, which for the first time gave union members the right to a strike ballot and to elect their leaders by vote, as "an irrelevant effrontery". He went on to describe a statutory requirement for ballots as "intellectually dispreputable" and he said that ballots would

"gravely undermine the effective pursuit by unions of their members' interests".

The hon. Member for Sedgefield attacked the same Bill as a "shabby, partisan stratagem". He described ballots as "a scandalous and undemocratic measure against the trade union movement."—[*Official Report*, 8. November 1983; Vol. 48, c. 170, 210.]

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will take the opportunity today at least to tell us why he changed his mind. Or when he changed his mind. [HON. MEMBERS: "Has he changed his mind?"] Or whether he has changed his mind.

Hon. Members: Come on.

Mr. Speaker: Order. With fewer interruptions, we might get on, because several hon. Members wish to participate in the debate.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill) *rose*——

Mr. Howard: The hon. Lady is speeding to the rescue of her hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield.

Mrs. Fyfe: Has the Secretary of State changed his mind on whether people should be free to join trade unions at places like GCHQ? Does he still think that Rupert Murdoch has the right to impose his idea of rights on his work force in *The Sun* in Glasgow and elsewhere? Perhaps the Secretary of State has changed his mind about that since Rupert Murdoch decided to support the Scottish nationalists instead of the Tories.

Mr. Howard: I invite the hon. Lady's attention to the 1990 Act that enshrined the right of workers to join trade unions as well as not to join them when we abolished the closed shop. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about GCHQ?"] We know about GCHQ and the security implications. If that is all Opposition Members can continue to parrot, the country will take them even less seriously than they suppose.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): I am grateful to the Secretary of State, as he has given way several times so far in this debate.

The Secretary of State has become notorious for his slippery use of statistics and he is at it again today, with half-baked assertions and selective quotations. One of the facts to which he has not referred is the remorseless and frightening rise in industrial injuries. We now have a low-wage, low-skill economy in which workers are not protected. Is that the kind of down-market economy that he is trying to create? If so, we shall go into the new Europe with our hands tied behind our backs.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman should be thoroughly ashamed of himself for making that allegation. As it happens, earlier today I met the Health and Safety Commission, which is a tripartite body with trade union representatives on it. Those trade union representatives told me how much better our health and safety record was than that of any other member country in the European Community. It is an absolute disgrace that the hon. Gentleman should make such unfounded allegations about health and safety in this country.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Howard: I have already given way far too often. I must get on.

Opposition Front-Bench Members will not say whether, when or why they have changed their minds. They are now much more reticent. They are reluctant even to mention the words "trade union" lest people remember the chains that bind the Labour party to the trade union bosses who are their paymasters. Yet, if one reads the small print of their policy documents, it is clear that they are just as firmly committed to repealing the legislation of the past 12 years as they were when their intentions were proclaimed so loudly and boldly by their own Front-Bench spokesman as little as two years ago.

I challenge the hon. Member for Sedgefield now to deny that his proposals would make it easier to strike, to deny that his proposals widen the scope for picketing and secondary action, to deny that his proposals would make it easier to call wildcat, unofficial action. I challenge the hon. Gentleman to deny that his proposals would make it harder—indeed, impossible—for employers to seek the protection of the law against unlawful industrial action if, for example, there had been a no-strike ballot.

Mr. Blair: What the right hon. and learned Gentleman is saying is absolute nonsense. Every time that he has made those allegations about Labour party policies, they have been refuted. For example, yesterday, and also last year, the Government alleged that, during an interview on the

"On the Record" programme, I was forced into an admission that miners would be able to picket power stations and other such places under Labour's proposals for industrial law. I shall read from the transcript that I have obtained. Mr. Dimbleby put the—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State gave way, so I think that the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) should be allowed to continue.

Mr. Blair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is it not strange that the Secretary of State is suddenly not so keen for me to meet his challenge?

Mr. Dimbleby said:

"If there were a miners' strike and the circumstances that you talk about apply, the power station tries to get coal supplies, for instance, from elsewhere, the miners would presumably be able therefore to picket the docks, picket the T and G drivers, picket the railway-drivers?"

The document yesterday alleged that I admitted that that was the case. However, I actually said:

"Absolutely not, no, absolutely not."

Mr. Howard: I can understand how sensitive the hon. Gentleman is about that interview. He did not read on further; when pressed by Mr. Dimbleby, the hon. Gentleman was forced into the statement that, if there was a loophole, the Labour party would look at it.

Mr. Blair: The Secretary of State should tell the truth. He has just alleged that I said that if there were a loophole, we would simply look at it. However, I said:

"I can't actually see that that could happen under the present set of proposals that we've got and if there is a loophole there,"—

[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."]

"we will make sure that it does not occur".

Mr. Howard: I can understand how sensitive the hon. Gentleman is about that interview, but I never even mentioned it, as I have far better points to make than that.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Some moments ago the Secretary of State made an allegation against my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) which has now been comprehensively rebutted by the transcript of the interview to which reference was made. Should not the Secretary of State withdraw those scurrilous remarks?

Mr. Speaker: I have heard nothing out of order in this rather excited debate, but would it not be a good idea to address ourselves to the motion?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree that that would be a good idea. When the hon. Member for Sedgefield, to whom I had issued a specific challenge, rose, I thought that he was going to respond to that challenge. However, he treated the House to an account of an interview about which he is understandably sensitive. We respect his sensitivities and do not want to infringe them, but it is a pity that he did not reply to the challenge that I issued to him.

I challenged the hon. Gentleman—as it is an important matter—to deny that his proposals would give trade unions protection against the normal consequences of breaking the law. Such protection was not available to any other organisation. I also challenged him to deny that he would once again allow trade unions to intimidate their members into striking by threats of fines and expulsions. That is the avowed policy of the Labour party—it is all in the small print of its policy documents. The effect of that small print would be exactly the same as the effect of the headlines in Labour's previous policy statements: the repeal of all our important reforms of the past 12 years and a return to the licensed anarchy of the 1970s.

When these matters are raised, the Labour party adopts an attitude of lofty distain—none of this, it implies, matters. We have, Opposition Members imply, and sometimes say, other policies that will make these changes irrelevant. So let us look at some of those policies.

Let us examine, for example, the Opposition's policy, or lack of one, on public sector pay. Their Treasury spokesman, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), has warned of a

"flood of public wage claims."

Why, after all, are the National Union of Public Employees, the Confederation of Health Service Employees and the National and Local Government Officers Association spending so much money in support of the Labour party if not to secure their post-election reward?

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Not NALGO.

Mr. Howard: Has not the hon. Lady noticed NALGO's £2 million advertising campaign?

Mrs. Golding: NALGO is not affiliated.

Mr. Howard: I know that. What effect does the hon. Lady think the £2 million advertising campaign is intended to have?

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that, in his efforts to secure a yes vote to the political fund, the now general secretary, Mr. Alan Jinkinson, said in an interview in the *Municipal Journal* that NALGO

"will not get involved in party politics"?

Is it not clear that that is exactly what NALGO is doing right now, and that Mr. Jinkinson and the NALGO hierarchy misled their members when they were pushing for a political fund three years ago?

Mr. Howard: Everyone can form his own view of the advertising campaign that NALGO is running, but it is difficult to see that it has more than one objective.

To complete my important point about public sector pay, have we been given any clue by the Labour party about how it will respond to this flood of wage claims from the public sector? No, we have not. The answer from Labour has been a deafening silence.

Then we have the Opposition's determination to introduce a national statutory minimum wage, reiterated only last Friday by the Member for Sedgefield. At least the hon. Gentleman's support for the minimum wage has had one happy result. It has an almost magical ability to bring people together. The leader of the CBI has found himself agreeing with the leader of one of our biggest trade unions. Economists at the university of Liverpool have found themselves at one with those noted monetarists at the *Sunday People*. Goldman Sachs is now in agreement with the famous free-marketeers at the *Guardian*. All are united in their criticism of the minimum wage, and are unanimous in disbelieving the claim of the Labour party that a minimum wage would have no impact on the level of unemployment.

[Mr. Howard]

Of course, the hon. Gentleman does not really believe that claim himself. That was why he came out with his famous formula, in a letter to *The Independent* last June:

"I have not accepted that the minimum wage will cost jobs . . . I have simply accepted that econometric models indicate a potential jobs impact".

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister desribed those as weasel words. My right hon. Friend was, as usual, being kind. It has often been said that one man's pay increase can be another man's redundancy notice. Under Blair's law, one person's pay increase would be another person's econometric jobs impact.

The truth of the matter is that independent study after independent study has confirmed the devastating job loss that would follow the introduction of the national statutory minimum wage. The hon. Gentleman has become desperate. Asked by Sir Robin Day last Friday if he was able to cite one independent report that confirmed his view, he dredged up a report published by the Institute of Public Policy Research.

A look at the report's inside cover tells us everything we need to know about the independence of that particular institute. Its chairman is the Labour party's education spokesman in another place. Its deputy director has worked as the personal press officer to the Labour party leader and indeed was a Labour candidate at the 1983 general election. One of its trustees was the head of the Downing street policy unit in the last Labour Government. Another was not only a member of Labour's policy review team but is on the party's national executive committee. The Institute of the Public Policy Research is about as independent as someone standing on the Kop at a Merseyside derby.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): That is something that you would not know about.

Mr. Howard: I have spent more hours on the Kop than the hon. Gentleman would know about—probably more hours than he has ever spent there.

Mr. Wareing: I want the right hon. and learned Gentleman to deal with another matter that concerns Liverpool—contributions by both sides of industry to political party funds. Is he aware that a company in my constituency last week received a letter from the Conservative party chairman asking for a contribution to Conservative party funds? That firm is Hexagon Community Ltd. which, because it is being begrudged funds by the Government, is being told by Merseyside TEC that it will have to fold up. Does the Secretary of State know about that? Without using four-letter words, will he tell us what sort of answer the chairman of the Conservative party received from the management of that company?

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is an assiduous letter writer, and his letters receive a favourable response from all parts of the country.

The point about the Institute of Public Policy Research is that anyone relying on any future assurance of independence from the hon. Member for Sedgefield has been well and truly warned. The importance of a national statutory minimum wage is not simply the foolishness of the policy itself or the damage that it would cause, although both would be enormous: it is the extent to which it illustrates the extent of Labour's economic illiteracy.

Faced with incontrovertible evidence from employers in the textile industry about the job losses that would result from a minimum wage, the hon. Gentleman came out with a new refinement when he said some days ago that the minimum wage could include bonus payments. Hon. Members should think about that. Under this latest refinement, an employer could say to employees, "I'll pay you £3 an hour, and if you earn it, I'll pay you a 40p bonus. Mind you, if you don't earn it, I'll pay it to you anyway, because if I don't I'll be breaking the law." There was not a glimmer of recognition from the hon. Gentleman that the whole point about a bonus is that it has to be earned. He just does not understand how a free enterprise economy works.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Howard: I shall give way for the last time.

Mr. Rowe: Is not it even more surprising that such a doctrine should come from a party whose most recent policy document contained, in a damning paragraph about Conservative party policy, the statement:

"Unit labour costs in the United Kingdom have gone up while those in Germany, Italy and France have fallen."

That is an extraordinary statement.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is right. The policies advocated by Labour would undoubtedly drive up those costs to heights that we have not seen.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield does not recognise either the importance of differentials. As Eric Hammond said:

"We will oppose any restraint on differentials by any government and we will do all we can in our power to increase the reward for skills, qualification and productivity, not just because it is in the interests of our members, but more importantly, because it is in the interest of our economy and country".

Those are the other policies that would come to fruition in the first weeks of a Labour Government. There would be a flood of public sector pay claims and a determined attempt to maintain differentials in the wake of the national minimum wage. What will be the response of that Government? It will be repeal of the laws affecting trade unions to make it easier to strike. There would be a flood of public sector pay claims, a determined attempt to maintain differentials and a relaxation of the laws limiting strike action. That is the hat trick of horrors that would occur in the first weeks of a Labour Government. That is the deadly cocktail that they would administer to the British people.

That is Labour's recipe for recovery, its route out of recession. That is how it expects to create growth and prosperity for our people. What a disaster it would be. Leave aside the sharpest ever peacetime tax increase and the high interest rates that expert after expert predicts would be the consequence of Labour's economic policies. Leave aside the higher inflation which Labour Governments always bring. Hon. Members who look at this hat trick of horrors, for which the hon. Member for Sedgefield is directly responsible, will see with total clarity how ruinous a Labour Government would be for our people.

We have been through difficult times. We are not being helped by world recession, but we are on the point of reaping the rewards for low inflation, and for our strike-free industrial relations. We are uniquely well placed to take advantage of the opportunities that will become available to us as we emerge from recession. One thing, and one thing alone, would wreck these prospects—the election of a Labour Government. It is because the people of our country understand this very clearly that that disaster will not occur and we shall see, under a Conservative Government, jobs created in the 1990s as they were in the 1980s. I commend the motion to the House.

4.34 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"condemns the Government for the depth of the recession, rising unemployment and the nation's skills crisis; and calls on the Government to cease its irrelevant attacks on trade unions and instead adopt a modern agenda for industrial relations which should include action on jobs, training, equal opportunities and fair treatment for people at the workplace, and support for the European Social Charter".

The figure for the increase in last quarter's long-term unemployed were announced today. At 93,000, it is the largest increase since records began. It follows on last Thursday's increase of 53,000 in the unemployment figures for the month, taking the total to over 2·6 million. I say that that is a cause for debate in the House today.

On the same day, last Thursday, the Council of Mortgage Lenders told us that home repossessions reached record levels last year and that they will continue rising through this year. I say that that is a cause for debate in the House.

This Thursday, the output figures for 1991 will be released. They are expected to show the longest fall in output since the 1930s. That has taken place under this Tory Government. I say that that is a cause for debate in the House.

Yet today, for the first time in five years, the Government have arranged a Supply day debate on the economy, adopting the procedures of an Opposition shortly before they become one. And to do what? To debate the long-term unemployment figures? No. To apologise for having created the longest recession for 50 years? No. To confirm that they were wrong about its length, its depth and its breadth, or even to announce some new measures or policies to bring the country out of recession? No.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: No. I shall give way in a moment.

Faced with the mounting problems to which I have referred, with the country beset by a rising tide of redundancies and closures and with families and businesses in real fear of what is yet to come, the Government call for a Supply day debate after 13 years in office to deal not with the problems but to shift the blame on to somebody else. They attack the trade unions today when we say that they should have been attacking the recession, rising unemployment and business failures. That is the Tory response to these problems, and let no one from now until polling day forget it.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Marlow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: I shall give way in a moment. I see that I have a reception party, which is flattering.

As the Secretary of State has raised his agenda of industrial law, let me repeat that we have made it clear that there will be no return to the trade union legislation of the 1970s. There will be no mass or flying pickets. There will be ballots before strikes and for trade union elections. Trade unions will be entitled to the same rights, but subject to the same responsibilities, as their counterparts in other European and western countries.

Mr. Howard: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: I shall give way in a moment.

Britain now has the fastest rising unemployment in Europe, a crisis in the nation's skills and a recession that is claiming new victims every day. It wants a Government who will meet those responsibilities and will not refight the battles of the 1970s because they have no answers to the problems of the 1990s.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman talked about ballots. Will he confirm that, in the terms of his party's published policy documents, an employer would have no remedy in respect of a strike called without a ballot, and an employee would have no remedy until he had exhausted his internal trade union procedures? That is what the hon. Gentleman's party's published policy documents say. Will he confirm that?

Mr. Blair: I shall not confirm that, because it is entirely untrue. The right hon. and learned Gentleman keeps making the allegation. He put the allegation in the policy document that he issued yesterday. Over the past year, in correspondence with the newspapers that has been published in response to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's allegations, we have stated time and again that there will be pre-strike ballots and that employers will have to gain access to the courts if there is a breach of the ballot provisions. We have said that on many occasions. The right hon. and learned Gentleman keeps repeating the same old fallacies because he does not want to debate the issues for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Howard: Will the hon. Gentleman now answer the question that he was asked, and refer us to the passage in his policy document in which that is stated? The fact of the matter is that that is not what the documents say.

Mr. Blair: That is complete nonsense. I have before me correspondence with the Secretary of State, into which I entered nearly two years ago. In that correspondence, I repeated the words that appear in our policy review:

"To qualify for legal protection, industrial action requires the support of a properly conducted ballot."

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): I have been listening to the hon. Gentleman with great interest. He is attempting to put over the message that the Labour party, in its new guise, will now accept some of the crucial elements in our employment Acts which it bitterly opposed when we introduced them. For the avoidance of all doubt, will the hon. Gentleman now state clearly and specifically which of our employment and trade union Acts he proposes to repeal, and which he proposes to retain?

Mr. Blair: I have just been answering the Secretary of State's questions. I answer them every time that they are raised, and I have answered them again this afternoon. Let me tell the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends that what people want to know today are the answers that the Government have to the problems that confront the country.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Blair: I shall take the interventions in turn. First, I give way to the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls).

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Gentleman name a single major strike that the Labour party has condemned over the past 10 years?

Mr. Blair: We have made it absolutely clear that we want a fair and balanced framework of law and good industrial relations. If I were in the hon. Gentleman's position, I should be answering and asking questions about the 1,000 or more additional people who have become unemployed in his constituency over the past year.

Mr. Janman: People want the answers to two questions. First, if—in the unlikely event of Labour's being elected to govern, and in the unlikely event of the hon. Gentleman's occupying the post of Secretary of State for Employment—a number of people take strike action in a company without going through the balloting procedure, or infringe some other part of what now constitutes the definition of a trade dispute, will their employer be able to obtain an injunction from the courts requiring the union to stop its action? Secondly, if the injunction is granted, will the court still have powers to sequestrate the funds of a union that ignores it?

Those are the questions that people are asking, and they want to hear the answers from the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair).

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Interventions should be brief.

Mr. Blair: Let me answer both those questions. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) speaks as though they had not been answered before. Let me repeat what I stated in published correspondence, referring to our policy document:

"To qualify for legal protection, industrial action requires the support of a properly conducted ballot."

It could not be put more clearly than that. As for the courts' powers to implement matters, we state that they will have

"the full powers of enforcement and damages."

What I would expect from the hon. Gentleman is some hint of apology for having promised his constituents that there would be no recession, given that more than 1,000 extra people have lost their jobs in his constituency over the past year. We have heard no such apology from him.

Mr. Marlow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: I will give way once more, but then I must get on.

Mr. Marlow: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. At the outset of his speech, he said that what we should be talking about is how we are to get out of the recession. How are we to get out of the recession, if the hon. Gentleman and his party want to impose a tax on savings and a tax on investment; if they want to impose the social charter—the curse of Delors—on industry; and if they want to revise the law on secondary picketing, allowing secondary pickets of Wagnerian proportions to run up and down the country? How will that get us out of the recession?

Mr. Blair: The hon. Gentleman will know, if he reads *The Independent*—perhaps he does not—that even the Democratic group in the European Parliament, which his party is seeking to join—he may not know that—has just issued a statement in which it deplores the Prime Minister's attitude to the European social charter. That is what sensible people think.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: No. I am sorry, but I wish to get on.

Today, we will set out a modern agenda for people at the workplace. That, surely, should start with their having a workplace to be at; but, since March 1990, nearly 1 million extra people have become unemployed. Every region of Britain has been affected. In the south-east, 400,000 more people have become unemployed; in the midlands, 200,000 more; in the south-west, 100,000 more; in the north-west, 80,000 more. Tens of thousands more have become unemployed in Wales, Scotland and the north-east.

According to figures published today, youth unemployment—which the Secretary of State did not even mention—has risen by 35 per cent. in the past year. Nearly 800,000 young people between the ages of 18 and 24 are now unemployed. According to the figures on long-term unemployment—also announced today—three quarters of a million people in this country have now been out of work for over a year. We did not hear a single mention of that from the Secretary of State.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I agree with my hon. Friend. These are the questions that our people are asking—2·6 million of them, including 800,000 young people. They will be amazed at the nerve and cheek that the Government have displayed in arranging such a debate at such a time. In so far as the Secretary of State and his right hon. and hon. Friends have any expertise at all in this regard, it is expertise in job destruction.

Mr. Blair: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Is it not staggering that the two subjects that the Secretary of State did not mention were unemployment and training? Those, surely, are the subjects that we should be debating nowadays.

Men in their 50s have been made redundant, and are unlikely ever to work again. Young people now roam the streets of our cities without work, hope or welfare. On the radio today, we heard of a new initiative launched by food companies to help people who are suffering from malnutrition—not in eastern Europe or in the developing world, but here, in today's Tory Britain. That is the scandal that we should be debating.

We should be debating the plight of young couples who were promised an economic miracle, who budgeted, borrowed and planned on that basis, and who now find that one partner—if not both—is without work and without the means to pay the mortgage, while their wealth is tied up in a house that is a declining asset.

We should consider those who were encouraged to go out and spend, and who are now being told that they should not have been so reckless. Those people are not the authors of their own misfortune; the authors are a Government, and a Prime Minister, who first promised them that there would never be a recession, who then said that the recession would be shallow and not deep and who, for the past year, have pretended that recovery was under way when they must have known that it was not.

Mr. Hain: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Secretary of State should apologise to the House, not only for the misdemeanours of his office over the past year but for the answer that he gave me earlier when I raised the question of industrial accidents?

The Secretary of State cited a meeting of the Health and Safety Commission at which he was present. I have since spoken to a TUC representative on the commission, Mr. Alan Tuffin of the Union of Communication Workers. He flatly denies the representation of the facts that the House were given this afternoon.

The Secretary of State said that the TUC had admitted that regulations of operating elsewhere in Europe were not necessarily as good as those operating in the United Kingdom. The fact is, however, that the number of industrial accidents is increasing. That is the fact that the Secretary of State refused to concede. The TUC put the point to him this very morning. Why did he not mention that in his reply to me?

Mr. Howard *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We do not have intervention on intervention.

Mr. Blair: My hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) has made a telling point. It has to be said that it should not entirely surprise us in regard to the Secretary of State, since, whatever qualities he has, the keen pursuit of the absolute truth is not one of them.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) is wrong in what he said. The specific point raised at the meeting of the Health and Safety Commission that I attended was that recent research has taken place on the level of industrial accidents across Europe. The clear conclusion is that we have a lower rate of accidents than practically any other member state of the European Community. The fact that they are increasing is a different point, and certainly not a point which I made earlier. It has nothing to do with what I said earlier. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw his entirely unsubstantiated and unjustified remark.

Mr. Blair: We can study the record. I did not think that that was quite the point which my hon. Friend was putting to the Secretary of State earlier. Perhaps they can have correspondence. It would be a relief if the right hon. and learned Gentleman was writing to someone other than me.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that industrial accidents are increasing? Is it not also a fact that under the Employment Act 1990, individual employees are not allowed to walk off a job even when the job is unsafe and dangerous? Is my hon. Friend aware that this morning I attended a memorial service, organised by the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians, at the Westminster Roman Catholic cathedral, in respect of the 129 UCATT members who lost their lives in industrial accidents in Great Britain last year? Does my hon. Friend agree that industrial accidents are increasing in Tory Britain partly because of the legislation that the Secretary of State put through the House?

Mr. Blair: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is extraordinary that in a debate on industrial relations the Secretary of State does not deal with these points.

I was talking about the predictions of recovery that used to be made by Ministers. For example, the Prime Minister said:

"Britain's position is strengthening month by month".

That is what he told us in the middle of last year. The Chancellor, back in May said:

"Things are starting to go rather well for the economy."

The Prime Minister again:

"I am confident that in the second half of the year the economy will begin to take off."

Of course, there was the famous statement by the Chancellor:

"The green shoots of economic spring are appearing once again."

The Secretary of State himself was never outdone by the Chancellor or the Prime Minister. He said last year:

"There is abundant evidence our policies are working extremely effectively."

He also said that there were

"unmistakable signs of the end of the recession."

He finally outdid himself when, on the eve of bad unemployment figures, he talked about a golden decade about to break upon the economy.

The Government's incompetence in giving us the recession was bad enough, but what people will not forgive or forget is the deception that sought to persuade people that the recession was over when, in truth, it was only entering its second phase. Why were they telling us in June, July and October last year that the recession was over and the economy was getting better? It was so that they could have an election in November before the country discovered the truth.

Of course, the country has discovered the truth, so they have moved on and they tell us that the problem is all to do with the world recession. We should look at the Department's own figures for employment and unemployment over the past year in Europe. No other country has suffered as great a rise in unemployment as us. The same is projected for next year. The Secretary of State's ultimate excuse was that the three-monthly trend in unemployment was at least down. Last Thursday, that also failed. Every day in Britain, thousands more join the dole queue as a result of the errors of his Government.

Let us be clear: it is not over-powerful trade unions which have made redundant those people and hundreds of thousands more, but a Government who had the power to help them and now have deserted them.

Mr. Nicholls *rose*——

Mr. Blair: No, I want to press on.

It is eight months since the Secretary of State announced his emergency programme, employment action, to help the unemployed, in particular in the south. Since then 300,000 more have become unemployed, to add to the 700,000 extra since the recession began. May I tell the House how many people are on the unemployment action programme? It is around 10,000, as the Secretary of State admitted today. That is only a fraction of the increase in the numbers of unemployed, let alone digging deep into those who were already unemployed before the

[Mr. Blair]

recession began. Instead of attacking the trade unions today, why did not the Secretary of State announce a proper programme for the unemployed?

Mr. Nicholls *rose*——

Mr. Blair: No, I am not giving way.

It is just like that other great initiative of Majorism—the proposal for the homeless announced last November. I understand that the so-called emergency package has not yet stopped a single repossession. It is not trade unions which have made the people homeless. It is not strikes which are making businesses bankrupt. The people made redundant know that their problems are caused not by their employers but by a Government who have betrayed both them and their employers during the recession.

Mr. Rowe: Any objective observer has to accept that there may have been some rashness in cutting interest rates at the moment the Government did, which may have helped to worsen the economic position. What the hon. Gentleman has to explain is why, when that possible misjudgment was made, the shadow Chancellor demanded that much more of a cut should have been made in interest rates.

Mr. Blair: As we have told the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends many times, the fault was to combine interest rate cuts with a tax-cutting Budget in 1988 which ruined the economy. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members need not take our word for it. Even the Chancellor the other day was saying that the deregulation of the financial markets was a major factor in the recession.

Mr. Janman *rose*——

Mr. Blair: No, I will have to get on; I have given way to the hon. Gentleman already.

The downfall of those people has not been poor industrial relations but incompetent government. Good industrial relations are vital. What is more, there is a virtual consensus, including unions and employers, about a modern agenda for industrial relations. The damage in continually harping back is not just that the difficulties of the 1990s lie unaddressed but that the solutions to those difficulties become obscured and even obstructed.

After unemployment, the single most important issue facing the country is the need to improve radically and urgently the education of our work force. It is only in the past few weeks that new and profoundly worrying evidence of the skills gap between Britain and our main competitors has emerged. The school of education at the university of Manchester, within the last few weeks, has said:

"Because schools in effect dismiss a large proportion of the population as unacademic rather than developing their talents for making things, designing things and working with people, Britain lacks the range and level of developed skills that other countries have at their disposal."

A study by Professor Rose at Strathclyde university just a few months ago indicated that we are falling behind Germany even as a proportion of those getting access to decent training and education.

Mr. Nicholls *rose*——

Mr. Blair: I have given way a great deal.

The number of apprentices in the United Kingdom stands at 350,000. In Germany it is 1·5 million. Is it any wonder when, over the 13 years of Conservative Government, Germany has been investing 50 per cent. more in employees to make sure that those apprenticeships happen? What is the Government's response to that crisis? After black Thursday came black Friday last week; according to the Department's own spending figures, £170 million in real terms will be cut from training next year. There will be cuts of £60 million in youth training and £50 million in employment training.

Since March 1990, when unemployment started rising, even on the Government's own figures 130,000 places have gone from training for young people and the unemployed. All over the country, training places are collapsing, training providers are closing and trainers are being made redundant. In those circumstances, it is the height of irresponsibility for the Secretary of State to fail even to mention today the training problems that this country faces.

When we raised the matter last November, the Secretary of State told us that the information that had been given by training and enterprise councils to the Select Committee on Employment about their problems in meeting the youth training guarantee was all out of date. We were told that the letters had been written before there was a settlement. I defy the Secretary of State to say now that there is not widespread concern and anger throughout training and enterprise councils and training providers at what is being offered in both youth training and employment training.

I defy the Secretary of State to tell us that TECs have not been in touch with his Department to complain bitterly about the cuts that he is currently forcing through. Indeed, since last November, the very time when he told us that these problems had been sorted out, Fullemploy has collapsed, as have Apex Trust, Hexagon—which was mentioned during the speech of the Secretary of State—Jobstream, and Sefton Dale training centre. Training providers up and down the country who could be skilling our work force for the 1990s are going out of business because of the policies that the Secretary of State is pursuing.

Over the past four years, £1 billion in real terms has been cut from training provision. Nothing could be more irresponsible or more incompetent. In our view, there is nothing more important than investment in training and in skills. In manufacturing, the key will be the application of ever more sophisticated technology by ever more highly trained people. In services, public or private, the consumer will demand ever higher levels of choice and satisfaction from employees, who must be able to supply them. In our view, a modern framework of industrial relations should start with the training and education of our work force.

If the quality of the work force is the key to transformation of our industrial relations we shall not get the best out of our employees by treating them like the worst. Fair treatment at the workplace today is not only a question of justice but an essential part of a modern economy. That is why we and every other party—Labour or Conservative—in Europe support the European social charter and the idea of basic employment standards across Europe.

Let us consider the declaration made by the very group in the European Parliament that the Secretary of State's party is trying to join. That group supports the European

social charter. When, over the past few weeks, we had discussions in the capitals of Europe, even from conservative Employment Ministers we heard ridicule of the plans of the Secretary of State for Employment. Those people said that the social charter was an essential aspect of a decent, modern, productive work force.

Why should not we have decent maternity leave benefits across the Community to enable women to raise a family and work? Why should not part-time employees have equal status with full-time employees so that they may have the benefits to which they are entitled? There should be a right to decent information about the decisions that affect employees and to participation in those decisions. And, of course, we need health and safety legislation to protect employees against the short-cut to profit that puts them at risk. Then there is the need for action to eradicate poverty levels of pay and to stop the taxpayers' subsidising of the low-pay employer. On top of that, why should not a work force have the right to membership of a free and independent trade union and to the benefits of that membership?

Every other country in Europe and in the rest of the western world gives those rights to people. Why cannot such rights be granted to our employees? Why not, as part of the start of a fair system of work, reverse the ban on free and independent trade unions at GCHQ, as any sensible Government would do?

The Secretary of State talks about abuses at the workplace. Let me tell him what many people believe to be the abuses at the workplace in 1992. I refer, for instance, to some of the salary increases granted to utilities chairmen under privatisation. What about the golden goodbyes, golden parachutes, given to people leaving firms, even when those firms have failed?

Mr. Lawrence Cooklin, chief executive of Burton—a group showing a loss of £165 million, which represents a halving of the value of its stock—gets, as the penalty, a £1 million golden goodbye. Mr. Warman and Mr. Bannister, of Saatchi and Saatchi, have received over £1 million. The finance director of British Aerospace received a pay-off of £500,000 days after the company had made 2,000 people redundant. I say that those are some of the abuses at the workplace today.

Surely these are the issues of the new agenda for industrial relations: unemployment, training, better opportunities for women, and fairness at the workplace. Those will address the new challenges. Britain cannot compete in the 21st century as a low-skill, low-tech economy, trying to undercut the low wages of the developing world. That way—the Tory way—has been tried for 13 years, and it has not worked. Our competitors, not just in Europe but even in the developing world, know that. It is not just France, but now even Hong Kong, which has recently adopted a training levy; it is not just Germany but now South Korea, which has a higher proportion of its school leavers in full-time education than does Britain; It is not just Italy, but now Indonesia, which is making investment in high-level manufacturing production a priority.

These new challenges cannot be met either by turning the clock back or through the old and familiar litany of bigotry and prejudice that we heard today. A Conservative party, faced with the profound problems of recession—rising unemployment, a crisis in the nation's skills and training—has as its sole response, stripped of its pretentions, simply an old-fashioned rant about trade unions. Such a party does not deserve re-election as the Government of Great Britain. People do not want to go back. That is agreed and accepted. I say that in this decade they want to go forward, and under Labour they will be able to do so.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

5.6 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): If I am allowed to interrupt this orgy of self-congratulation from the Opposition, I should like to try to be a little emollient in what has become a somewhat heated exchange. The Labour party deserves encouragement. It has come a long way since it opposed strike ballots; it has come a long way since it fought to retain closed shops; it has come a long way since its Members of Parliament revelled in the publicity that they could achieve by standing on bloated picket lines. I hope that I may encourage it to move a little further. We might sometimes even see some of its spokesmen prepared to condemn strikes, rather than consistently encourage them. We might get Opposition Members to understand a little of the basic economics of employment and pay.

As I pointed out in an intervention during the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, it is a remarkable fact that the Labour party, in its most recent policy document, attacks the Conservative party's record. That attack includes the following sentence:

> "Unit labour costs in the United Kingdom have gone up, while those in Germany, Italy and France have fallen."

A little later in the same policy document, the Opposition emerges with its solution to that problem. Its solution is, of course, the statutory minimum wage.

I am not clear how the statutory minimum wage which is to be introduced immediately Labour takes office will resolve the problem of unit labour costs in the United Kingdom being higher than those of our competitors. One of the remarkable achievements of recent months has been the fall in those costs—a necessary prerequisite for our economy to start on the recovery for which it is extremely well prepared.

I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) glorying in the fact that he would return to a compulsory training levy. I wonder how many employers —especially smaller employers—will welcome that commitment. The compulsory training levy was one of the burdens on industry which employers were anxious to remove. The consequence of its removal has been a dramatic shift from the position in 1979 when everyone looked to central Government to provide all the training budget to one in which the vast majority of training expenditure now falls, quite properly, on employers.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): The hon. Gentleman talks about unit labour costs. Is he aware that unit labour costs might fall if labour were given more capital to spend? One of the problems in this country is that we have not had the same manufacturing investment as Germany, France and Italy. We noticed that the Secretary of State refused to answer any questions about the comparison with other countries in the Community in terms of manufacturing investment since 1979 because we are near the bottom of the league—only Greece has been lower in that league table.

Mr. Rowe: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. The more investment there is per employee, the greater the opportunity to make a profit; but by far the soundest basis for investment is the profitability of a company, and it is the reinvestment of profits which makes the difference. If taxation and compulsory basic wage regimes make it harder for companies to make and retain their profits, they will have less to invest. If the hon. Gentleman wants to see the truth of that, he has only to consider two British companies—British Gas and Glaxo—to see the amount they invest in providing not only technology but training for their employees. They are very successful companies, but there are dangers if one is also trying to increase employment in the short term.

There is no doubt that the more technology that is given to individual employees, the fewer employees one requires in the short term, but I realise that, in the medium and long term, that is the only way in which to proceed. I hope that we shall rapidly return to a position in which companies make very large profits so that they can invest those profits in the training and new machinery that they require.

Another terribly important change that has taken place in recent years is that companies have ceased to do all their innovative work in house. They have decided—quite properly—that it is more flexible, efficient and rewarding to put the work out, often to small specialist subcontractors, who are quicker on their feet and more in touch with the cutting edge of technology, and who can adapt what they do more quickly than many large companies can in house. As a consequence, not only is the number of employees employed by large companies falling, but smaller firms cannot survive if they are bound by such regulation as the European Community would like to force on us.

It was a courageous step by the Prime Minister at Maastricht to refuse to sign the European social charter. There are already clear signs that Germany in particular, but other countries too, are beginning to think very hard about the rigidity which will be forced on them by that charter.

It was interesting to hear the hon. Member for Sedgefield talk with such passion and fervour about the interview in which he said that he would in no circumstances encourage the sympathetic strike action which his interlocutor was trying to elicit. From the Labour party's latest policy document—I think that it is the latest, but it might be the second latest—it is clear that, if an employer is deemed in any way to be assisting the employer against whom the strike action is being taken, it will allow, indeed encourage, secondary action.

From the example that the hon. Gentleman quoted in his interview, I should have thought that, if a power station or something similar were being picketed, the chances of secondary action against anyone who attempted to supply it or to offer any other supportive action would be very great. In that case, we would be straight back to the destructive industrial action from which the Government have mercifully released us. I hope that members of the public will remember what it was like in the days when such sympathy action and secondary picketing was paramount.

Even though at present there is a lamentable number of people out of work—I certainly understand the cost to people who lose their jobs—we should congratulate ourselves that 2 million more people are in work now than in 1983. That is a direct consequence of the expansion in the economy which we have managed to secure since the Conservatives came to power in 1979.

I am not entirely surprised that the Opposition react so fiercely to any criticism of trade unions. Their Benches are probably the only sector of the economy in which trade union membership has held up. There has been a remarkable fall in the number of trade unionists, and it is clear that unless they are provided by a Labour Government with a number of the privileges which they so grossly abused in the bad old days, they will find it very difficult to recruit and keep members. I believe that they see themselves slipping into an inexorable decline.

Where do the priorities of the trade unionists lie? I do not blame them for this, because it is part of the nature of trade unionism, but it is no more sensible to ask them to change their ways than to ask a leopard to change its spots. Their priorities lie with what they perceive as the—usually short-term—well-being of their existing members. If one considers the opposition that they have put up to every change in the national health service and to every proposed change in the education service or any of the public services, one sees that their preoccupation is with their members' vested interests. It has little if anything to do with the state or the expectations of the consumer or customer of those services.

The motion represents a sound and basically excellent statement about what we have seen and about what we have achieved. If the Labour party were ever to be returned to power, we should instantly see a return to the greedy, self-serving trade unionist closed shoppery which we have fortunately got rid of.

5.19 pm

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): As someone who has been a member of a trade union for 30 years, I do not recognise the description of trade unionists given by the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe). He seems to be wholly unaware of the fact that, far from being interested only in current members, trade unionists throughout the country were serving, until the Government had their way, on health authorities, local authorities and school governing bodies. Trade unionists are involved on behalf of young people who are not even old enough to work, let alone to be members of trade unions. It is not true to say that trade unionists are involved only with trade union members.

I am a member of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, and I am sponsored by that union. I make that point before it is raised by Conservative Members. I know that the Secretary of State is fond of pointing out such sponsorship.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): So am I.

Mr. Clelland: So is the Minister.

My union does not pay me any money, and no sponsoring union pays money to individual Members. My constituency party receives the magnificent sum of £150 every three months to help in the administration of the work that I do on the union's behalf. We also get help with election expenses. That is a far cry from the thousands of pounds that Conservative Members put in their own pockets every year when they represent private interests in this place.

The motion talks about
"success in reforming industrial relations".
It also recognises the
"improvement in the underlying strength of the British economy".
I am not sure whether the emphasis there should be on "under" or on "lying". The claim that the economy is improving will come as a surprise to the 6,000 people a week who are losing their jobs and to the 1,000 businesses a week which are going under. If that is an improvement in the economy, God help us if we ever see a downturn. As evidence of the improved industrial relations, the motion says:
"the number of working days lost last year is provisionally estimated to have been the lowest total since records began in 1891".
That statement is backed up neither by statistics nor by facts.

The number of working days lost last year was about 160 million. If unemployment is taken into account, the figure is a massive 780 million, which is hardly something to brag about. We know what the motion means, although it does not say it, which says something about the confidence of Government draftsmen. The motion is talking about the number of days lost because of industrial disputes.

That reduction would be welcome if it truly meant that industrial relations had improved, and if the number of disputes had fallen because of a happy and contented work force. I have no doubt that, in some sectors, industrial relations have improved with the passage of time, and with more enlightened employers and trade unions. It would be surprising if that were not so. That has happened in spite rather than because of Government interference in relationships between employers and employees.

It is interesting that the Government interfere with such regularity in the affairs of trade unions, when in every other aspect of life, their hands-off approach has led to the neglect of huge swathes of industry and public services. That has happened to such an extent that respected organisations such as the Builders Merchants Federation, with which I had lunch today, are expressing concern that the lack of Government input in the ills of the nation's economy is leading to problems in industry.

No one likes strikes, and if there are fewer of them for the right reasons, I welcome that. However, Conservative Members continually wheel out the argument about strikes, blow it up out of all proportion and then use it as a political weapon rather than as an argument for improving industrial relations.

Even during the 1970s, to which Conservative Members often refer, in the worst year that Conservative Members can dig up, the total number of days lost through strikes amounted only to 0·2 per cent. of the total days worked in that year. That figure compares with 130 million days, or 2 per cent., lost because of illness—10 times the number lost through strikes. It compares with 30 million days lost because of accidents at work every year—more than twice the figure for the worst year for strikes. As we have heard from construction workers visiting London today, 139 workers were killed in the industry during 1990-91. Tragically, there have recently been deaths and injuries in Monkwearmouth colliery to add to the sorry list. Some 50 million days were lost through smoking-related diseases.

Why do the Government do nothing to cut those lost days if the days lost have so severely affected the British economy? When was the last time the Government legislated to improve health and safety at work, and on the prevention of illness? The answer is that they have never done that because their legislation is based on bigotry and dogma, and not on the interests of the economy.

Mr. Forth: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will have a word with his hon. Friend the Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) who worked with me to see through Committee the Offshore Safety Bill. It was designed precisely to improve health and safety at work for workers offshore.

Mr. Clelland: That was a welcome move, and I accept the Minister's point. However, I am talking about the bulk of British industry. The Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, to which the Secretary of State referred, was introduced by a Labour Government. Since then, this Government have cut the number of inspectors working for health and safety at work which has led to an increase in accidents at work.

What about unemployment? If lost working days are important to the economy, what can we say about the 624 million days lost every year as a result of Tory Government policies? Unemployment has played a part in making people fearful about standing up for their rights at work. To reduce the number of days lost by strikes from the 0·2 per cent. level, the Government have deliberately increased the number lost by unemployment by more than 50 times that figure. They then have the arrogance to say that that is a price worth paying. When the election comes, we shall see whether the loss of their own jobs is considered in the same light.

The Secretary of State asserts that all that has led to an improvement in the economy. His only piece of evidence for that is that productivity has improved. In the present circumstances, with manufacturing industry devastated by 13 years of Tory neglect and mismanagement, such a statement is frightening, but revealing. It is evidence of the ignorance of the Secretary of State about industry. Let me educate him about the meaning of the statistics on productivity which he trots out as evidence of recovery. Unfortunately, he seems to have gone off for his tea break. If he were running industry, I have no doubt that he would not allow his employees to have a tea break.

Let us suppose that the Secretary of State ran an industry. Let us suppose that he employed 100 people who produced 100 articles a day. A Tory Government recession comes along and 75 people have to be made redundant. The 25 people left may begin to produce 30 articles a day, which equals a 20 per cent. increase in productivity.

That is what the Secretary of State means when he talks about increasing productivity. What he does not say is that it has led to a 75 per cent. unemployment rate and to a 70 per cent. drop in output in the same company. That is what has happened to manufacturing industries under this Government. That is a sign not of recovery but of collapse. If the Secretary of State does not understand that, it is no wonder that we are in the middle of the second recession under his Government.

The Secretary of State tells us that another indicator of recovery is the number of people in employment. That point was repeated by the hon. Member for Mid-Kent. But they do not tell us that 60 per cent. of the new jobs created in the past 10 years were part-time, low-paid and low-skilled. But, of course, that represents a considerable constituency of people who will welcome the Labour party's proposals for a minimum wage.

[Mr. Clelland]

Another hardy annual in such debates is the winter of discontent. I am surprised that it has not yet been raised, but I am sure that it will be. Yet another is the slogan "Labour is in the pockets of the unions". But Conservative Members cannot have it both ways. The strikes of the winter of 1978-79 were against the then Labour Government's pay policy. So Conservative Members must answer the simple and obvious question. If Labour is in the pockets of the unions, why was there a winter of discontent?

For over 100 years, the trade unions have fought for the interests of people who work. They have raised people's standards of living, improved their conditions of work, extended their holidays, shortened their working week and, most importantly of all, given them dignity in work and ended the sweatshop exploitation that gave rise to the birth of trade unions in the first place. Every step of the way, the Tory party has opposed and denigrated the trade unions. It was Tory legislation which caused trade unions to realise that they had to become involved in politics to prevent them from being legislated out of existence. The past 13 years have reinforced that necessity.

The people of Britain, whether they are in a trade union or not, would have been far worse off without the trade unions. That is why, in polls, the majority of people believe that the unions are still necessary, despite the lies and propaganda rained down upon them.

The debate is entitled "Industrial Relations", but Conservative Members have said nothing about industrial relations. Where they have skirted round the edges of the subject, they have displayed the extent of their ignorance. They know that they will lose the election, so they are wheeling out all the old bogeymen to frighten the electorate. I can tell them that the electorate are terrified of the thought of another five years of prejudice, bigotry and mismanagement. That is why, despite Conservative Members scare tactics, they will be sitting on this side of the House after the general election.

5.31 pm

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): I listened to the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) with interest. He criticised us for not talking about industrial relations and for skirting round the subject. But he and his hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) also avoided the subject of what industrial relations used to be like in Britain and how they have changed. They concentrated on unemployment, as if industrial relations were a secondary matter which had little to do with how industry performed. As the Government's motion shows, we have seen a remarkable change in the industrial relations climate in Britain, especially in engineering industries.

The Labour party has frequently turned its back on reform of industrial relations. I recall the 1960s when industry in the midlands, especially the car industry, was perpetually subject to strike threats. A Labour Minister at the time considered a document called "In Place of Strife". Many of us who were not inclined towards the views of the Labour party thought, nevertheless, that it had recognised that some action needed to be taken about the industrial climate. It was noticeable that the party turned its back on that and has turned its back on most of the trade union and industrial relations reforms that were so necessary.

When the Labour party returned to office in 1974, it changed the industrial relations legislation that had been introduced. That is the threat to Britain today. Even after 13 years out of office, if the strange occurrence that the Labour party formed a Government arose, Labour would again turn back and give the trade unions a power which is neither necessary nor good for industry or the country.

In the car industry and general engineering industry of the west midlands during the 1960s and 1970s, the industrial relations climate and the bias towards the trade union movement and its power was such that the threat of strike was almost farcical to the press and television, both locally and nationally. Strikes were almost expected. The threat of strikes also created a climate in which management was almost incapable of managing as it should. I do not blame all that happened in those industries in the 1960s and 1970s on the trade unions. I accept that much of what happened was the responsibility of management.

The way in which the power bases in the car and general engineering industries were formed meant, in effect, that decisions were made to go nowhere. There was a reluctance to make the changes that were necessary on both sides. The consequence was stagnation. Let us consider the level of car production for the home market in about 1971, the way in which the market was penetrated by foreign manufacturers, how our proportion of the home market dropped, how the car industry performed and what state it was in. It is clear to me that industrial relations within the industry were a major factor in its lack of development and the eventual demise of a great deal of it.

As a result in large measure of the industrial relations changes brought about by the Government, a different approach to the needs of industry has developed between employees and trade unions. I am not one who suggests that there is no place for the trade union movement in industry and in white collar sectors. I believe that unions are an important aspect and that they have an important role to play. I do not believe that we should move anywhere near the arrangement in Europe where employees automatically sit on the board of directors, but trade unions have an important role to play.

As a result at least in part of the changes that have taken place in industrial relations, the relationship between employers and employees is now on a much more realistic basis. That is to the benefit of all in the company. One of our great weaknesses as employers and industrialists has been our inability to manage change, yet business is always about managing change, however one looks at it and whether in manufacturing or the service industries. We now see much more willingness by employers to involve employees in the management of that change and development. That takes us forward.

Mr. Clelland: If industrial relations have improved in the past 13 years to the degree that the hon. Gentleman describes—he seems to describe improvements in industrial relations purely on the basis of days lost through strikes—can he explain why that improvement in industrial relations is matched by a decline in manufacturing industry to such an extent that it is at its lowest level in its history?

Mr. Stevens: I have not mentioned the reduction in days lost in strikes. I have deliberately avoided mentioning

that. The hon. Gentleman asked why the present production level has declined. It is because we are in recession. I also remind him that the unit production of people in industry has increased substantially in the past 13 years. The hon. Gentleman earlier did a simple calculation to show that, if one produces less with fewer people, there is automatically an increase in productivity. That is absolute nonsense. It is not a fact. It is a fact that one can reduce the unit cost by not having the surplus labour that we introduced into some industries in the 1960s and 1970s. To a large extent, the market will demand that increased productivity. It will determine what one can sell and how much one needs to make to fill the market. Unless we ensure that unit costs continue to decrease compared with those of our competitors, we shall not be able to compete.

In many industries, we have a better relationship between employer and employee and, as a result, there have been substantial productivity gains and improvements in the control of unit costs. After 13 years of Conservative government, we are more competitive and industrial relations have had a part to play. If we dismiss industrial relations and do not recognise that they have had a substantial effect on how we manage change and develop our industries, we shall be cutting out an important aspect of our industrial life.

Mr. Clelland: I was not dismissing industrial relations or saying that they had not been an important factor in the performance of industry. I accept that they have been. I was referring to the emphasis that the hon. Gentleman placed on what he described as the "improvement" in industrial relations during the past 13 years. That has not been matched by a similar improvement in the performance of our industry.

Mr. Stevens: In many places it has been matched by a distinct improvement in our competitiveness abroad. For example, consider the state of our machine tool industry in the 1970s. Consider how what had been one of the strongest industries in the country was allowed virtually to disappear, not because of the trade unions but because of what happened in the industry. We have now built up a machine tool industry which can compete with the best in the world, especially in specialist areas.

Mr. Clelland: It is much smaller.

Mr. Stevens: It is smaller, and it is able to compete in technology, on price and because of the relationships within the industry.

The hon. Member for Tyne Bridge is in danger of talking down British industrial units, which are not inferior beings, although Opposition Members often give that impression. They are able to compete and they will be able to compete even better provided that we maintain a balance in the industrial relations climate.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): The hon. Gentleman is talking about the west midlands. He must know that 37 per cent. of manufacturing capacity has been lost there, and that 300,000 skilled engineering jobs have been wiped away. He is talking about what he considers the bad old days of the 1970s. In my area, there was an unemployment rate of under 2 per cent. in the 1970s and today it is 20 per cent. How can the hon. Gentleman argue about that? To many of my constituents, the good old days were in the 1960s and 1970s, when they had jobs and we were producing at home and exporting abroad.

Mr. Stevens: The hon. Gentleman is right. In the 1960s, we were producing and exporting in the west midlands —my home area. I worked in several industries in that area. However, we were not improving our productivity to match that of our competitors abroad. They came in and took our markets, at home and abroad.

Mr. Turner: Because of lack of investment.

Mr. Stevens: One may criticise investment, which brings me back to something I said earlier about the attitude of management and unions in some of our engineering companies. There was a reluctance to change and the same reluctance to invest. Management and employees are now much more willing to accept change and to go forward. We must look to that in the future.

Some of our old industries in the west midlands—especially in the black country, near the constituency of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner)—were not the type of steel industries which would develop. Some were old industries.

Mr. Turner: We could debate that.

Mr. Stevens: We can debate it. However, some of the methods used in, for example, some rolling mills in the 1950s and 1960s had to be changed.

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): Does my hon. Friend agree that a combination of bad Government policies in the mid-1970s, bad practice and bad management contributed to our losing our markets and our world share, with the result that we have had more unemployment and less industry?

Mr. Stevens: We did not do ourselves a lot of favours in many different directives—[HON. MEMBERS: "Directives?"] I am sorry, I meant directions. I am so used to being in the European Standing Committees that the word "directives" comes readily to mind.

There have been important developments which are to be welcomed and they have been encouraged by legislation. Changes in manufacturing industries have been dramatic. We could not have envisaged the step forward in technology 10 or 15 years ago. The speed of change is faster than anything that we had previously recognised, and that makes good industrial relations concepts—which I hope we now have—even more important.

There has been a change in industrial relations and the emphasis is now on the white collar side. Opposition Members may correct me, but I think that there are now probably more people in white collar unions than in the blue collar unions that we used to accept as the main force.

Industrial relations are also required in white collar unions. In the 1960s they were not renowned for going on strike or bringing everything to a halt, but they are an important aspect of legislation. Some white collar unions have a direct relationship with industry, but many others are involved in the public sector and service industries.

We have introduced legislation, such as doing away with the closed shop. I hope that we shall take a decision about allowing people to join the union of their choice. I was disappointed that we did not introduce legislation to make contracts legally binding. I do not think that many

[Mr. Stevens]

European systems of industrial relations are better than ours, but I should have been happier if legally binding agreements had been introduced. We have not done so in the latest proposals, but we are moving towards giving people more freedom of choice when joining unions and that is correct, especially for white collar unions.

White collar unions and some other unions in the public sector do not pose the same threat to industry and to production, but, should they wish to take action under the old legislation, they would pose a threat to services. That was what happened in 1979 in the winter of discontent. I would not have mentioned that, but the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge asked why it happened if the Labour party was supposed to be in the pocket of the trade unions.

If there is enough scope, if enough pressure is brought to bear and if the Government react to that pressure time and again, the point is reached eventually when even a Labour Government cannot continue in that vein. There comes a point when it is too much and the Government must say enough is enough. In the 1970s, there were pressures not only from the trade union movement and other such groups but from other areas, such as the International Monetary Fund, as I recall. One cannot divorce the two; I do not believe that we should blame the trade unions for all the decisions made by the Labour Government between 1974 and 1979. That Government managed to make enough decisions during that time to stand on their own feet.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): In the hon. Gentleman's explanation of the winter of discontent, would he apply the same logic to the spate of scandals in the City and the sleaze and corruption in the private sector that we have seen recently? Would he apply the same logic to the major accidents and disasters that have taken place? Would he agree that the Government are totally indifferent to such matters and have allowed them to happen?

Mr. Stevens: The Government are certainly not indifferent. We have introduced more measures to regulate the City than any Government I can remember. No Conservative Member supports the activities that have come to light in the City in the past few years. Measures have been taken to try to close the loopholes and to stop abuses.

Situations change, and one must consider them and what controls them. The City could not cope with a changing situation and that allowed some people to take advantage of and abuse the system, to the disadvantage and deprivation of others.

Mr. Clelland: I cannot allow the hon. Gentleman to get away with his explanation of what happened during the winter of discontent. He contends that the trade unions got away with everything that they wanted under the previous Labour Government, but that does not bear any relation to what happened. He will recall that a two-year pay policy operated, in which the trade unions and the Government co-operated to keep down pay in order to beat inflation. It was a successful policy. It was only when the Labour Government wanted to extend the policy for a further period that there was an argument between the Government and the trade unions. The trade unions did not get their own way. The reason for the winter of discontent was that the Labour Government were not willing to give the trade unions their own way.

Mr. Stevens: The hon. Gentleman forgets that, by the time the Conservatives came into office in 1979, we had bills to meet and commitments to honour as a result of the policies of the previous Labour Government. In addition, we had to honour the promises that we made at that time.

An industrial relations revolution has taken place and our attraction to inward investors, which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State mentioned, is of enormous importance. In 1990, 350 decisions were taken by companies to invest in this country, bringing 62,000 jobs here, adding to the 240,000 jobs already created by inward investment. Our specialised manufacturing industries have been relatively successful over the years and are still, but we are also attracting some of the mass production industries from abroad, in particular from Japan.

Some countries are much more skilled and adept at mass production industries than ourselves. However, if we have freedom to develop new relations in industry, we can look forward to those industries encouraging technology, investment, and exports and meeting the demand in the home market.

In the 1960s, we had the worst industrial relations possibly of the century. The morale of the work force went down. If there was a strike, there were neither winners nor losers. Instead, discontent prevailed within industry and that generated the possibility of another strike. Not all conflicts were strikes: many were disputes and arguments. Of course that did not apply to every industry—some industries worked quite well—but we experienced apathy towards change and development.

Today, there is an absence of confrontation between employers and employees in industrial relations. We have co-operation such as involvement in training and the Government have taken more initiatives on training and put more money into that than any previous Government. Co-operation is the way forward and that comes from trust and not from the enforcement of the will of one party on the other.

The motion applauds the Government's policies and their proposals for the future. That is the way forward for industrial relations, rather than returning to a system in which the trade unions had almost total control over the business. Mutual interest between management and employees, and between the country and the Government, is the key. That is what the Government have laid the foundations for, but that strategy will not succeed if our policies are reversed by any future Government.

5.54 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): In many respects, this has been a somewhat depressing debate. My heart sank when I heard the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) announce that he intended to talk about the car industry of the west midlands, because all he did was pause and then talk about the situation in the 1960s and the 1970s. That summed up just how backward-looking so much of this debate has been.

To his credit, the hon. Gentleman eventually introduced a ray of sunshine and a glimmer of hope when he praised increasing employee involvement in decisions affecting the management of change. It is a pity that he

then allowed himself to be sidetracked to the 1970s and the winter of discontent of 1979. The hon. Gentleman concluded with a flourish when he announced that it was necessary to reconsider the 1960s. Too much time today has been spent looking back rather than looking forward.

I do not believe there will be any prizes for those who guess the purpose of today's debate. Those who were present during the clamour of the Secretary of State's speech will be aware that it had little to do with industrial relations. The language used by the right hon. and learned Gentleman was, at times, profoundly depressing—for example, he described the trade union leaders of today as dinosaurs. Even the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), who is usually one of the more modest and moderate of Conservative Members, totally dismissed all trade unionists and tarred them with a very black brush.

My party has never had any mandate to argue the case or to defend the actions of those trade unions, which, at times, have been extremely irresponsible. However, this debate has done a great disservice to the hundreds of thousands of trade union officials, at all levels, and trade union members who have worked so hard for their fellow workers by promoting health and safety ideas and negotiating decent deals. To allow such an important debate as this to be conducted in terms of seeing those on the opposite side of the argument as the enemy does nothing constructive for industrial relations.

It is clear that the Secretary of State's strategy was to reawaken the anxieties and fears that the Government believe are deeply buried in the national psyche about the historic financial ties between the Labour party and the trade unions. In the bygone age of the winter of discontent and the like, it was easier to point an accusing finger at certain trade union activities and the public dislocation caused by them.

The Government are seeking to buttress their attack with the largely irrelevant Green Paper that was published last year. That document and this debate show that they are bankrupt of positive ideas about what to do regarding industrial relations. They have found it necessary to create a smokescreen to hide the real issue—for more than 3 million of our fellow citizens, it is not a question of whether we have good or bad industrial relations, because they do not have a job in which to experience an employer-employee relationship.

We are now faced with the deepest recession since the 1930s and the problem of unemployment is getting worse, not better. There have been a record number of business failures and home repossessions, but the Government's sole response has been to cite a record about the lowest number of days lost through strikes. Some might conclude that, given that economic activity is at a snail's pace, it is hardly surprising that those who are fortunate enough to be in work are reluctant to go on a go-slow or to strike.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends speak much about centralisation. They believe that, for example, the public services should be decentralised down to the lowest denominator in terms of local government. If the hon. Gentleman supports regional pay bargaining, will he explain why he opposes the concept of 'trust' hospitals negotiating local pay agreements?

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that regional pay bargaining is happening in the private sector. We believe that it will continue and that it would be artificial to try to return to a system of centralised pay bargaining. Our policy on regional pay bargaining in the public sector is very much related to our policy to set up regional assemblies throughout England, with national parliaments for Scotland and Wales, which, if they are to have any meaningful powers, must have the power to determine pay in the public sector over the areas for which they are responsible.

We have objected to trust hospitals in many areas. We do not necessarily oppose local management, but we strongly oppose the lack of local accountability and taking hospitals away from the accountability of local health authorities in England and Scotland. I fear that, if I delved further into health matters, I would be called to order.

The occupants of this Bench have been willing in the past to support a number of measures for changes in employment law. We supported the Government's moves to erode the effects of the closed shop, the limitations placed on secondary picketing and the need for greater accountability. Indeed, we were ahead of the game in promoting the greater accountability of trade union leaders to their members through secret postal ballots. We also supported the Government in the abolition of the dock labour scheme.

Equally, we share the analysis that higher unemployment would be an inevitable consequence of a national minimum wage, although the Secretary of State's hyped-up figure of 2 million more unemployed did not help the credibility of that argument.

Mr. Forth: In defence of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, I should make it clear that our range of estimates of job losses as a consequence of a statutory national minimum wage, range from as few as 100,000—*[Interruption.]*—up to 2 million if full differentials were restored on top of a statutory national minimum wage. So there is a range of possibilities of job losses, depending on the circumstances, although I am surprised that Opposition Members seem satisfied that only—I emphasise "only"—100,000 jobs might be lost at the lower end of the range.

Mr. Wallace: That was an interesting clarification. I have always found the figure of 2 million incredible at the top end. It was interesting to hear the Minister's explanation and the premises on which the range of figures were calculated. As I said, my hon. Friends and I fear that unemployment would be a consequence. If the purpose of a minimum wage is to combat poverty, regrettably, unemployment is perhaps the most direct route to poverty.

We believe that a social dimension of the European Community is an essential part of the development of the EC, yet we have not been uncritical of the form in which some of the proposals have come forward. For example, we were sceptical of the provisions of the social chapter in the draft Maastricht treaty. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) said in the debate last December, our chosen course would not have been unilaterally to opt out, but

"we would have wished to see those clauses altered. Indeed, they could have been altered if the Government had not wasted their bargaining power in attempts to defend the indefensible, attack the trivial and obtain the illusory".—[*Official Report*, 18 December 1991; Vol. 201, c. 303.]

Against that background, we have supported many changes that have occurred. The latest set of proposals

[Mr. Wallace]

were announced by the Government last month and are referred to in the motion. But the Secretary of State's speech was so negative that he did not even mention some of the positive changes that he is suggesting.

The positive proposals, trailed in the Green Paper and announced last month, seem more an attempt to play the union card and, with such a confrontational approach, they are more likely to damage industrial relations than to tackle the real issues and the crisis facing industry. We are retreating more and more into the rhetoric and battles of the 1970s and early 1980s, rather than setting an agenda which is relevant for radical action in the 1990s and beyond.

Mr. Evennett: The hon. Gentleman said much about what he claims to be the negative aspects of our proposals. We are left in doubt about his party's positive policies for industrial relations. Does he agree that to return trade unions to their members and to have secret ballots is not negative but the way forward?

Mr. Wallace: If the hon. Gentleman will be patient, he will hear what my party has to propose. Given that my party has been proposing co-ownership and partnership in industry since the days of David Lloyd George, the hon. Gentleman is displaying considerable ignorance if he does not know what our policies are. My hon. Friends and I voted for the concept of postal and secret ballots. Even the Minister will acknowledge that we supported those measures. I said that we had had a negative approach from the Secretary of State today. Although he announced some proposals last month, he did not even refer to them today.

The *Financial Times*, referring to the Green Paper published last July, wrote:

"it is hard to detect a groundswell of opinion that further legislation is needed at all. And there is a case—the more telling because it is made by the right-wing Adam Smith Institute—that the government has gone too far in interfering in unions already cut down to size by a decade of reforms. The government has frequently insisted that its aim is to reform the unions, not destroy them. Mr. Howard's green paper will not destroy the unions, but nor will it improve industrial relations nor enhance the competitiveness of the British economy."

There is also some polling evidence that the public's tolerance is being strained by the present negative approach. In an NOP poll last July, only 18 per cent. felt that more legislation was needed, while 66 per cent. thought that enough had been done already. By contrast, 84 per cent. wanted action to tackle unemployment and 80 per cent. wanted initiatives to improve training.

For most people, better industrial relations is more about improved co-operation, partnership and consultation than about court injunctions and whittling away some remaining employee rights. The Minister spoke about the rights of employees, and we have heard him on about that in the past. Although we agree that an employee should have the right not to join a trade union, just as he has the right to join, that right to join must not be unduly emasculated by the emasculation of trade unions. For the right to union membership to mean anything, employers should recognise the right of unions to negotiate on behalf of their members. That is not a recipe for lightning strikes or the exploitation of union members; it is simply a guarantee of the fundamental right to union membership.

Liberal Democrats also see employees' rights as going far beyond the realms of trade union affairs. To avoid disputes in the first place, substantial alterations must be made to our working practices. In spite of the employment legislation of the last decade, in many places of work, industry is trapped in old thinking and old practices. In that, as in many other areas, Britain has fallen behind the common practice of our European neighbours and the requirements of a modern economy for a flexible, highly skilled and highly motivated work force.

As the Prime Minister constantly reminds us, this is the age of the citizen and citizens charters, but lacking from all the glossy literature and ministerial statements has been any effort to define the rights of the citizen at his or her place of work. If the Secretary of State really wants to propose something worthwhile and radical in industrial relations, he should examine proposals to invest the citizen with real rights of decision-making at the place of work.

Liberal Democrats, and our predecessors, have a long history of advocating more rights of participation and partnership. As long ago as 1928, David Lloyd George identified industrial confrontation as a drag on economic efficiency and performance and charted a vision of better industrial co-operation. Today, we identify the fact that patterns of work have become more diffuse. Even the Government point to an increase in part-time working. Advances in technology open up the prospect of more home working, but we must not forget the home working that already occurs and that at times leads to the exploitation of some people who cannot defend themselves.

A new charter for the citizen at work must guarantee individual rights in his or her workplace—a right to demand access to participation in decision-making, a right to consultation on matters affecting employee interests, a right to share in the profits and ownership of the firm and a right of access to relevant information.

Those who were present during the intervention of the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) in the Secretary of State's speech will recall that he mentioned a closure that took place in which the management concealed from the employees orders worth £16 million or £17 million. Those employees should have had a right to that information. One wonders whether the Government recognise that employees should have such rights. If they do not, why not? Employees should also have the right to join or not join a trade union and the right to a contract that guarantees equal opportunities.

I accept that, in times past, our formula would have been to impose appropriate structures. However, given flexible work patterns, a far better approach for the 1990s is to endow employees with statutory rights and let employers and work forces together work out how best they may be implemented.

Mr. Barry Field: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wallace: No, I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman, who made a rather irrelevant point. I do not wish to give way again.

We should propose a new industrial partnership agency to offer advice and assistance and, ultimately, in the event of an employer defaulting, to step in and ensure that employees' rights are respected.

The Government's latest proposals amount to a rag-bag of measures, some worthwhile and others not.

They scarcely add up to an agenda for a constructive approach to industrial relations. A three-year check-off will not motivate employees or foster a shared commitment to success.

Plans to improve financial accountability of unions to their members, although not objectionable in themselves, do not amount to a strategy for enhancing industrial relations in the 1990s. It would be far better for the Secretary of State to consider proposals that enable every individual to be not a subject at work but a citizen at work, with rights of citizenship in the place of work.

6.13 pm

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): I have no problem about reminding the House or the nation what it was like in the late 1970s, and I have no compunction about reminding the House what it is like in Liverpool, Lambeth or Newham today. The Opposition want to return to power, and people should know what is coming up the track if they are foolish enough to put them back in power.

For generations, industrial relations were dogged by an "us and them" mentality—workers versus management, shop floor against boardroom. A festering culture of distrust and hostility had developed, in which team work was viewed as collaboration and productivity ran a poor second to the work to rule. Confrontation had replaced co-operation, and militancy had overshadowed compromise.

At the heart of that industrial ghetto sat the Labour party and the trade unions, each ensuring that Britain continued along the dismal path of structural economic decline. In return for block votes and campaign funds, the Labour leadership sat on their hands while the Luddites of the trade unions wrecked efficient working practices and obstructed industrial democracy with methods that would have done the KGB proud. That was all carried out in the name of the class struggle.

Who will ever forget the Grunwick picket line—a rabble of louts irresponsibly egged on by members of the Labour Cabinet? Who will ever forget the Wapping dispute, where the police were subjected to unacceptable violence? Everyone will remember the miners' strike, especially the day when a sickened nation was told how striking miners had killed an innocent taxi driver with a slab of concrete. His only crime was to ferry a miner to his place of work. Yet, in all the years since then, I have not heard one Labour Member or prospective Labour Cabinet Minister condemn the strike. I do not suppose that they ever will.

The Labour party, as it did then, tries to portray itself as a modern and progressive party, yet it will not reform the donkey and cart of trade unionism. We have done that. Twelve years of Tory Government have put a stop to restrictive practices, the closed shop and flying pickets. As in all other areas of policy, whether education, local government or the national health service, we have devolved power back to the individual. The trade union movement, despite entrenched and often violent opposition, was to prove no exception. Our measures have ensured that unions exist for their members, not the other way round. Consequently, working men and women have now been given the freedom to decide for themselves whether to take part in industrial action.

It is an impressive record of achievement. In the past 12 years, we have provided financial assistance for union ballots; removed the legal immunity for picketing, secondary action and civil damages; required unions to elect their principal executive committees by secret ballots at least every five years; ruled that ballots are to be held before industrial action; and restricted the scope of unofficial action. None of that restricts the rights and freedoms of the individual. That raft of reforms curbs the influence and activities of the pocket dictators who used to run this country.

It is not surprising that, in "Competing with the World's Best", the CBI welcome the Government's reforms. That is hardly surprising, given that they redress the balance between management and unions. Managers are now free to run companies in the interests of employees and shareholders alike.

In January 1979 alone, during the infamous winter of discontent, 3 million working days were lost. In January 1991, there were only 26 stoppages, the lowest January figure since 1929. In 1979, 29 million days were lost, but in 1991, 3 million days were lost. Those sensational figures are there for all to see.

Reading Labour's coffee-table policy documents gives the impression of watching a horror video in rapid rewind. Images from the past flash before the eyes, until one is, once again, confronted by a scene that we shall never forget—rats running around Leicester square and tourists incredulously seeing the rubbish piled as high as Leicester square cinema. That is what a Labour Government means. The dead could not be buried, while the unions and the Labour leadership said nothing. Dying cancer patients and supplies were refused entry to hospitals because the National Union of Public Employees and the Confederation of Health Service Employees said so.

Where were the Labour Government then? The then Prime Minister was in Barbados having a damn good holiday. When he returned he asked, "Crisis? What crisis?" He soon found out, and found himself sitting on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Clelland: It may come as news to the hon. Gentleman to know that, only today, I have had to intervene on behalf of 26 cancer patients needing radical and life-saving surgery in my constituency because they could not get admitted to hospital under this Tory Government.

Mr. Evans: I have plenty to say about that. This Government have invested £37 billion in the national health service. They have introduced 65,000 more nurses and 16,000 more doctors into the health service, and 30,000 more patients every week are treated by the national health service than in 1979. That is my answer.

In 1979, the Government of the day did nothing. The nation simply heard the silence of the lambs, and the only head above the parapet was that of Jim Callaghan. All he could mutter was "Crisis? What crisis?" Meanwhile, his Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), who was off to Heathrow to borrow more money from the International Monetary Fund to bail out a bankrupt country, was called back by the official receiver—the IMF. He was in his Jaguar and nearly on the plane when he was told to come back. When he got back, he was told "You've had your £50 to take on holiday. You haven't got enough money to go." Hon. Members should realise that, in those days, people could take only £50 a year abroad.

[Mr. Evans]

That shows the state of the country when the Labour party was running it. Who will ever forget it? It was no wonder that we became the laughing stock of Europe. It was said that, while the French had 100 different cheeses and the Germans had 100 different beers, Britain under Labour had 100 different ways of going on strike. So much for the social contract—it clearly blew up in the face of the Labour Government.

The hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) talked about inflation. The Labour Government achieved an inflation rate of 9·7 per cent., which they thought was wonderful—it seemed so after the experience of 27 per cent. inflation, but it was never down to 4·1 per cent. The Opposition talk about co-operation with the unions, and suppressing wages, but inflation was still 9 per cent.

Mr. Graham: What good does it do to bring down inflation, when the terrible poverty in this country means that many people cannot buy goods, and cannot eat or heat their homes in winter? Does the hon. Gentleman think that that is right? The Government drive to bring down inflation but increase unemployment levels by literally millions.

Mr. Evans: Talk about inflation comes rich from the hon. Gentleman. If one does not have low inflation, the cost of goods means that they will be priced out of world markets, which is what the hon. Gentleman is talking about.

Although we quickly learned the painful lessons of the 1970s, the Labour party clearly has not. Opposition Members would, without a blush, restore the right to take secondary action, weaken the power of the courts to punish law-breaking unions by preventing the total sequestration of trade union incomes and assets, and abolish the procedure under which unions face injunctions if there is any evidence of an intention to break the law. On top of all that, the unions will gain two privileges previously denied them even by past Labour Governments: a legal right to enforce recognition, regardless of membership, and absolute protection from dismissal for strikes.

The Labour party would refer industrial disputes to a new industrial court with no effective power to enforce the law and no authority to sequestrate funds. However, experience shows that unions obey the law only when their own funds are at risk. Therefore, the Labour party would effectively draw the teeth of the law, and to hell with the consequences. Once again, the unions would be above the law, and would doubtless act like the poll tax dodgers of the Labour party. In short, Labour's plans would be as effective as allowing a French referee to referee a French rugby match.

On reflection, it should come as no surprise that the Labour party is prepared to roll over and play dead for the unions, as theirs is the most indiscreet of love affairs. Far from being conducted in the back bedrooms of hotels, it is enacted on the stage of conference halls, under the full glare of television lights. At its conference in the summer, the Transport and General Workers Union voted to boycott youth training, employment training, and the training and enterprise councils. It dealt with more boycotts than the South African trade mission and, for good measure, voted for the repeal of all trade union reforms.

Who should be present at Blackpool to listen to the tripe and rubbish, and speak to the TGWU but the Leader of the Opposition. When it was his turn to speak, he did not utter a word of criticism, but stressed how proud he was to belong to the TGWU. He said:

"It is the Labour party in so many ways."

Who would dispute that? Certainly not the 32 Labour Members who are supported by the TGWU or the 120 Labour Members supported by other unions, who include in their numbers no less than the Leader of the Opposition himself, the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), and the shadow spokesmen for employment and for trade and industry. The TGWU later promised to give £3 million to the Labour party's election coffers—surprise, surprise. The Labour party is not so silly as to bite the hand that feeds it.

Many years ago, I had the fortunate opportunity to privatise the rubbish and street collecting services of Southend. It was my first confrontation with the TGWU. I found that its members were aggressive and biased towards employees. I was supposed to have inherited 230 workers, but in fact I only ever had 195. The management of the local authority were frightened to go to the yard, and when I went down I had to have police protection.

The rubbish of residents living in houses built after 1970 was not collected during the week, as TGWU shop stewards wanted to arrange for overtime working on a Saturday morning. It was no surprise that the overtime of the eight shop stewards meant that they earned more than one third more than the rest of the work force. In addition, the dustmen would not collect shopkeepers' rubbish. They kept a black book, and any shopkeeper who did not want the rubbish collected when overtime would be paid did not have his rubbish collected. As a result, the shopkeepers either had to give money to the TGWU shop stewards to bolster their private income, or their rubbish was not collected.

I also had a confrontation with Mr. Ted Knight, who then ran Lambeth council. In an argument, it was revealed that rubbish was being collected from houses that had been flattened in the war. Rows of houses had been flattened in the war, and dustmen were getting paid for doing nothing, as the houses no longer existed. That is the sort of thing that happens when the unions go mad. The worst part of it was that the TGWU and the Labour party condoned such action and thought that red Ted Knight was a good sort.

Opposition Members face a conundrum. The corporate social charter experiment of the 1970s was seen to be a dismal failure, but the unions want a return on their investment—I do not blame them. They expect the keys to the back door of No. 10, and a direct input into economic decision-making. How does the Labour party get round that? It is easy: it sets out plans for a national economic assessment to involve unions and employers in annual talks to help pay bargaining, and regular talks on the economy that will inform collective bargaining. In ordinary language, that means beer and sandwiches—or croissants—at No.10. We could place a bet that the views of industry will be drowned by the rustling of dirty, used banknotes.

It is inevitable that business costs would be dramatically increased, so putting jobs at risk. A foretaste of the sort of schemes that would come out of the official think tank is the national minimum wage, about which we have all heard.

Mr. Forth: At a cost of 100,000 to 2 million jobs.

Mr. Evans: A cost of 100,000 jobs—my hon. Friend must be joking: it would be more like 2 million.

Opposition Members do not know what it would cost. They just plunge headlong towards Europe and a national minimum wage, mindless of the fact that women and the thousands of young people who like part-time work will not be helped by the proposals, but will be dumped on the unemployment market.

Even some Opposition Members are trying to wriggle out of that commitment. The minimum wage is another product of the common room economics that the Labour party would impose on industrialists and businessmen competing in world markets. The shadow trade and industry Front-Bench team have never done a day's work in industry between them. The team is made up of social workers and television people who do not have a clue about business, yet they expect the country to let them run our businesses. Can we believe it? Nobody can believe it.

The Labour party's "Where do I sign?" attitude to the social charter is further evidence of its inability to grasp the realities of the marketplace. The Commission's dogmatic proposals for working time, workers' councils and maternity leave should be the product of negotiations between employer and employee, not of centralised imposition. Socialists cannot grasp the fact that, in a modern economy, new working practices require a flexible industrial relations environment that is not dominated by the dinosaurs of the trade union movement.

To this end, I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's further proposals for reform—that unions in the public sector should give seven days' notice before taking strike action, and that consumers of public services should be able to seek injunctions against unions if they are threatened with unlawful industrial action. I also applaud his decision to require strike ballots to be conducted by post and to be subject to independent scrutiny. It is also right that legislation should be introduced to give employees the right to join the union of their choice, and that no worker should have union subscriptions deducted from his pay without consent.

The Government have shown that they want to build on the formidable achievements of the past 12 years; Labour wants to return to the barricades of the 1970s by implementing policies that reek of the collectivism of that decade. Our reforms have shown that the individual is paramount; socialists persist in viewing the worker as just another face in the crowd of card-carrying brothers. Industrial relations should be about people, not cattle, which is why the Labour party would once again fail the people and drag the nation back into the gutter where it was before we took over in 1979.

6.31 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham North-East): The motives for this parliamentary pantomime and for the speech of the Secretary of State are transparent. The Government tabled a motion on industrial relations, but they are not interested in industrial relations. Rather, this debate is a measure of the desperation of the Conservative party, which knows that quite soon, possibly on 9 April, it will be punished by the British people and by the millions who have suffered the ravages of this recession. All who have lost their jobs, all who have had their houses repossessed, all who have had their businesses fold under them will have their say quite soon.

The Government are desperate because they face electoral defeat and they want to divert attention from the recession. The Secretary of State mentioned an increase in manufacturing output. In the past 13 years, manufacturing output has increased by 4·9 per cent. That compares with the figures for Germany at 26·6 per cent., the United States of America at 33·3 per cent. and Japan at 60 per cent. Manufacturing investment has fallen in Britain over the past 13 years by more than 6 per cent., as against increases in Germany of 47 per cent., in France of more than 51 per cent. and in Italy of more than 72 per cent.

We are bottom of all the league tables. The Conservative Government inherited the bonanza of North sea oil; it has all been squandered, mainly to pay for unemployment, which has increased by 1 million since this Prime Minister took office. He it was who said, "If it isn't hurting, it isn't working," and it was the present Chancellor of the Exchequer who said that mass unemployment was a price well worth paying.

We have had record business failures. Last year there were 80,000 house repossessions, and this country is experiencing homelessness on an undreamed of scale. The Government's reaction has been pathetic and demeaning. They have put on this debate to bash the unions and to try to divert attention from the real issues and garner a few votes by raising a few bogeys from the trade union world instead of looking to the future.

The Conservative party has nothing to offer this country for the future. The hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) spoke of his exploits many years ago in Southend. The Conservatives want to go back to the past, back to the old agenda. They talk about the confrontations of the past instead of looking to the future. It is a rather squalid manoeuvre, based on malice and on hatred of the trade unions. Hatred of the unions is written all over the faces of Conservative Members. People with that attitude are unfit to hold office in the Department of Employment.

Conservatives should be reminded that trade unions consist of British people and British voters—more than 8 million of them. They are not the enemy within; they are our people. Yet the Government's policy is to make war on our people. That is an antediluvian approach; it is self-defeating, and it is a recipe for strife and confrontation.

In no other advanced country do we find this attitude. The successful countries all regard the unions as valuable partners with which to co-operate and work—that is one of the reasons why they are successful.

We must establish a proper balance between working people and their employers. That balance cannot be sustained without trade unions, which is why they are an essential part of our industrial relations scene. When I worked in industry and was in the trade union movement, I found that it was the very best people who gave their time to the unions to help their fellow men. After six anti-trade union legislative measures, the Government cannot blame the unions for this economic crisis—they cannot claim that strikes are to blame. It is entirely their own fault.

[Mr. Ron Leighton]

One of the main proposals in the Green Paper is that there should be new rules for deducting union dues from members' pay—what is known as the check-off, which is mentioned in the Government motion. When I was in industry, I paid my contributions every week. Because I admire the work of my union, I now pay by bankers order. But the check-off is the modern way of collection—a widespread and uncontroversial practise. I know of no demand from anyone—not even from the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield—for a change, yet the Government propose to meddle in this system. That is entirely uncalled for. There is certainly no demand for it from employers. The Government's motives are mischievous and malicious.

The Government hope that their proposal will cause problems for the unions—that it will damage and weaken them. They propose that authority to deduct contributions must be renewed each year or when the amount is altered. They hope that the unions will have difficulty collecting all the signatures on paper. The Government gleefully think of all the extra work, and hope that the unions will lose some of their members.

As with the rest of the Green Paper proposals, this one is one-sided. If the check-off system needs annual renewal, why, in equity, should not all direct debit arrangements need it? Why should not a person belonging to the National Trust have to renew annually? We have give-as-you-earn schemes and save-as-you-earn contracts. We have payments into benevolent funds. Some people pay their poll tax in this way; some pay their gas bills in this way. Why should not the same system apply to all?

The Government are clearly not interested in the principle. The proposal is merely a stick with which to beat the unions. Check-off takes place only if both sides agree to it, so what is wrong with it?

The next idea is a seven-day cooling-off period that has to follow a strike ballot. There must have been plenty of notice even before the strike ballot, but the Government propose another seven days. That might have some merit and could be examined. Perhaps the Government are thinking of that idea, because so far the overwhelming majority of strike ballots have been in favour of a strike. The Government legislated for ballots because they thought that strikes were caused by union officials. They did not understand that union officials spend most of their time trying to stop strikes. In my union we have always had ballots and we would have them anyway.

Ballots have turned out to be powerful weapons in the hands of the trade unions. We have just seen that in Germany, where there was an overwhelming vote for a strike and the employers thought it wise to make a much better offer. The Government now say that, after a ballot, there must be a seven-day cooling-off period. That should apply to both sides and should not be one-sided. Most precipitate industrial action is caused by hostile action by employers. There should be a seven-day period before either side can take action.

I now deal with the Bridlington arrangements. The British trade union movement grew up in an untidy way. We can contrast that with the situation in post-war Germany where there is one union for each industry. We have multiple trade unions. That could lead to disruptive inter-union rivalries and splinter unions and would have a destabilising effect, but the Bridlington rules bring some sort of order.

Everybody, including employers, agreed that the Trades Union Congress had a responsibility to ensure that anarchy was avoided by means of a set of sensible ground rules. I am not aware of any sensible practitioner in the field who takes a contrary view. I have no doubt that the rules are not necessarily perfect and that from time to time they should be reviewed, but the Secretary of State, uninvited by anybody, is now proposing to interefere in his hobnailed boots. He proposes to scrap the lot, to make the ground rules unlawful, and proposes nothing to replace them. There will be a vacuum, a free-for-all. That is highly irresponsible, and I am certain that it will receive little support.

The Government are schizophrenic: in one breath they say that they favour single-union agreements, while in the next they want to give free rein to splinter unions and inter-union rivalries. It should be noted that no one has to be a member of a particular union or any union, and that no union has to be a member of the TUC and subscribe to its Bridlington arrangements. The idea that anybody suffers a loss because he cannot join a union which refuses to recruit him is absurd. It is ludicrous.

The Government rhetoric is that an employee should have the right to join a union of his or her choice. Again, that is one-sided. I would believe the Government if they said that an employee had the right to be represented by the union of his choice. The Government say nothing about unions having the right to be recognised or about the employee's right to be represented. The motion contains nothing about citizens' rights at the workplace. Perhaps that is not surprising, because the British employee has lower pay and fewer holidays, works longer hours, has less job security and enjoys fewer trade union freedoms than employees in any comparable European country.

Mr. Clelland: My hon. Friend gives some interesting statistics. Would he care to speculate on why British employees are so much worse off, given that the trade unions had the terrific power that the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) described?

Mr. Leighton: That is a complete myth. It is a sort of bogey which Conservatives in their present difficulties are trying to raise up to frighten everybody, and, of course, it is complete and utter nonsense.

The Government have advanced another idea—an amazing new proposal on training. We all know that training is one of the Government's biggest failings. The country can compete only if it has an educated and trained work force, but there is a huge skills gap between Britain and its competitor nations, and it is getting bigger. What is the brilliant new idea that is being seriously advanced about training? It is that there should be new contracts, so that the worker who leaves his company prematurely—perhaps the Under-Secretary of State in his winding-up speech will tell us what "prematurely" means—has to pay a penalty. That is the new idea to get training going.

That was precisely the argument of the people who erected the Berlin wall. They said, "We are spending money on training people in East Germany, but when we have trained them they go to West Germany. We cannot tolerate that. We must put up a wall." Does the

Under-Secretary think that all British companies should build a Berlin wall around themselves and that a penalty should be paid by people who have the temerity to leave?

The proposal tries to address the real problem of poaching, which causes problems in British industry. The good employers train and the bad employers poach. Therefore, we must look after the good employer. How do we do that? Do we build a Berlin wall around companies? The Government are taking the wrong approach. We do not want to build walls or abolish civil rights and freedoms, and surely no one wants to abolish the free movement of labour—or is that what is being suggested? The right answer is to ensure that all employers contribute to training and that none is allowed to dodge the column. That is the argument for what is called the levy. This is an old chestnut.

We all know what has to be done. It is said that a levy would lead to big bureaucratic training boards, which we do not want. But there is a way to do it without bureaucracy: it is done in France, where every company has to contribute a percentage of turnover to training. Companies that do not subscribe in that way have to pay a levy. Companies that train pay nothing, but the bad employer who seeks to poach has to pay. That is the way to do it. I shall be interested to hear the Under-Secretary's response to that, because the Government are wrong in their approach to training.

The Under-Secretary cannot deny that the Government are having the most awful row with the TECs, the training and enterprise councils. They are cutting the money to the TECs, which are demoralised, and many people in the private sector are saying that they will not participate any more. Some of the TECs will not sign a contract with the Government because the contracts are not good enough.

The so-called training guarantees to young people are the means by which the Government say they are committed to youth training, and that every young person leaving school at 16 will get a job or a training place. That is untrue. In borough after borough and area after area across the country, there are hundreds of young people with no job, no training place and no benefit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) told us that he had lunch with an employer's organisation today, and I have met many groups of employers recently. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I are all putting on weight because we are dining so often with employers. Employers have the idea that the Government will lose the next election and that there will be a new Labour Government. Who is to say that the employers are wrong?

Therefore, they want to meet the Labour party and to learn from its representatives of the party's policies. They want to know how they will fare under the Labour party. Surely that is wise.

Having met many employers, I have had the opportunity to discuss with them their many worries and concerns. No group, however, has talked of the need for more trade union legislation. I do not know whether a Conservative Member can refer to an employers' association that is saying that it wants more trade union legislation.

As I said, employers have problems and worries. They have told me that they are worried about the recession. They are worried also about lack of demand. Some of them who are exporters are worried about the high value of the pound. All of them are worried about high interest rates. The CBI and the Engineering Employers Federation —I understand that some Conservative Members are dining with members of the federation this evening—want investment tax incentives. The federation tells me that it wants the Government to put more money into training. It reports that firms are struggling to survive and that with the low unit costs of youth training they cannot afford to take on trainees. As I said, not one group of employers has said that it wants more trade union legislation.

It is not only employers who take that view. I shall try to be helpful to the Government by saying that the public do not want more trade union legislation. If the occupants of the Treasury Bench think that when electors go into polling booths they will be swayed in choosing where to put their cross by a commitment to anti-trade union legislation, they are barking up the wrong tree. In other words, they are wasting their time.

Opinion polls show that fewer than one in five people, including Conservative voters, want more trade union legislation. The public are not asking for it, because they do not want it.

It is interesting also that 93 per cent. of the public want the law to entitle people to be represented by trade unions when they have a problem. We know that more and more people are involved in problems in industry, and that is why trade unions have become popular. Employees are facing redundancy. There are those whose contracts are being torn up unilaterally and who are having foisted on them new contracts that offer worse pay and conditions.

Mr. Forth: If, as the hon. Gentleman alleges, trade unions are so popular, why is their membership falling?

Mr. Leighton: I should have thought that a Minister in the Department of Employment would know about these matters. He has asked me the question, however, and as I happen to know the answer, I will tell him.

There are two reasons for declining membership, one of which is that the industries that employed trade unionists have disappeared. The coal-mining industry is one example. At the end of the war, it had about 1 million employees—1 million trade unionists. It now employs about 100,000. The motor car industry is another example. Industry after industry is collapsing. That is obviously the main reason for the declining memberships of trade unions.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Does the hon. Gentleman draw any conclusion from the fact that the most highly unionised industries have disappeared or declined, while the less unionised have thrived and expanded?

Mr. Leighton: That used to be the position. When the hon. Gentleman and his party caused the previous recession, unemployment was mainly in the heavy industries, which in many instances were in the north of England. Almost all of them were in constituencies that were represented by Labour Members, so it did not matter to the Government. They were Labour seats in any event.

The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) should know—I understand that he is a big wheel in the City and is familiar with the financial world, including the banking sector——

Mr. Flannery: The hon. Member is a farmer in Lincolnshire.

Mr. Leighton: I have heard about the hon. Gentleman's sheep farm, but I do not want to go into his farming activities. He farms in his spare time. He is a gentleman farmer. He does not look after his sheep himself. I do not complain about the way in which his sheep are cared for because, as I said, he farms in his spare time. He has an allotment, as it were, of about 4,000 acres. His large country estate—his vast acres—is financed by his work in the City and in public relations, for example. He knows that many of those wearing red braces and driving Porsches in the city who bought up all the property in docklands are not doing so well nowadays. I see that he is nodding his head. That is where unemployment is to be found now. Conservative constituencies are being affected.

As I said, 93 per cent. of the people believe that employees are entitled to be represented by trade unions when problems arise in their industry. The squeeze is now being felt by white collar workers, many of whom are not members of a union. This week I dealt with the case of 19 employees who had had their contracts changed unilaterally. If anyone wants me to give chapter and verse, I shall. The 19 were not members of a union, so they decided to come to me. I wrote to their managing director and persuaded him to change his mind. Is that not good? They were not trade unionists but they asked me which union they could join and from where I could get help for them. I repeat: 93 per cent. of the people would like to be represented by a trade union if they were facing problems.

I warn the Under-Secretary of State that I am about to say something that will upset him. It might give him palpitations. I ask him to steel his nerves. If he wants to be really popular——

Mr. Forth: Me?

Mr. Leighton: —and wants his party to win the next election, he and it must stop barking up the wrong tree. The policy that is truly popular and commands the support of 85 per cent. of the population is the national minimum wage.

If the Government changed their policy and stole the Opposition's clothes—if, in other words, they said that they were in favour of a national minimum wage—they would probably sweep the country. The Secretary of State's campaign against a national minimum wage has been an appalling flop. The idea behind the debate of bashing the trade unions and grubbing around for a few votes will similarly fail.

6.58 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): If 93 per cent. of the population want trade union representation when there is a problem, and if we bear it in mind that during the 1980s the number of people with jobs increased by 2 million, it is rather curious that, during that decade, the number of people who were members of trade unions declined from 13 million to 10 million. That does not say much for the perception that the public have of trade unions and for the marketing that trade unions are engaging in to attract a potential membership that is growing all the time.

There is no point in the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) saying that only in traditional industries is there trade union membership, and to end the argument there. If trade unions are seen as the power houses of industrial relations, as the hon. Gentleman would like to portray them, and if the work force overall is expanding, surely even those industries not traditionally associated with trade unions would see an increased membership rather than a declining membership.

Mr. Clelland: The hon. Gentleman may not have been in the Chamber earlier, when I explained that the increase in employment to which he has referred was overwhelmingly in the part-time, low-paid and low-skilled sectors, and overwhelmingly in occupations in which—regardless of the Government's legislation—people are still being intimidated into not belonging to trade unions.

Mr. Coombs: When we examine the facts, that is revealed to be arrant nonsense. Of the 2 million extra jobs created between 1982 and 1990, just over 50 per cent. were full-time jobs. Over the same period, the real take-home pay of a man on average earnings, with two children, increased by around £41 a week. Ipso facto, it seems likely that the section of the population on which the unions should have concentrated their recruitment drive was increasingly affluent—although the workers concerned were not those with whom the unions had been traditionally associated.

I was struck by the observation of my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), towards the end of his excellent speech, that Labour Members who talked of trade union reforms that would tend to return us to the black hole of Calcutta represented by the industrial relations of the 1970s did not recognise the way in which the new industrial society was evolving. The firms that succeed are flexible: they operate in small units and carry out their collective bargaining on a local rather than a national basis. In such firms, there is plenty of flexibility in the performance of tasks and relatively little demarcation. Those are the companies that succeed in today's market —which is not a mass-production market, but a market that relates to ever-increasing changes in taste.

The dramatic decrease in the number of days lost through strike action represents a great achievement of the industrial relations legislation that the Government have produced over the past few years. We have heard about the reduction from 29 million to 1 million in the number of days lost through industrial action; last year, only 759,000 days were lost for that reason. My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield mentioned the accompanying fall in the number of stoppages: the number has dropped from 2,500 a year—the 1970s average—to only 650 in 1990, and only 354 last year. Of course that is an achievement, and of course, given the changes in industrial society that I have mentioned, it constitutes an advance that only 34 per cent. of workers now decide their wages on a national collective basis, as opposed to 47 per cent. in 1983.

However, although all those developments represent dividends from the important industrial relations changes introduced by the Government, the most valuable advance is the recognition that the most successful firms are the most flexible: firms that give the work force an individual sense of purpose, and treat them as individuals rather than as part of a mammoth mass collective. That, too, was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield.

Those are the companies which have achieved the largest increase in productivity. A company in my constituency manufactures parts for the motor industry.

After it had been involved with the industry for some time, Toyota came along and said, "We should like to purchase from you, but as part of the process we will give you some lessons on man management and industrial relations. This is how we increase our productivity, with exactly the same capital equipment as you."

In a single year, that company achieved a productivity improvement of no less than 70 per cent., with exactly the same work force. The carpet industry is another example of the improvements that have been made: there is no doubt that, over the past 10 years, the work force have been much more flexible and the old demarcation lines have gone. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] It is not rubbish. We have seen, for instance, the introduction of CADCAM —computer-aided design and manufacture. All that has happened because the trade unions have got rid of the old-fashioned, confrontational "us and them" attitude and have begun to realise that successful companies proceed from the premise that they are sitting on the same side of the fence as their work force—that the only enemy is competition, both at home and abroad.

It is therefore not surprising—although the fact is easily glossed over by the pseudo-industrialists on the Opposition Benches—that, between 1984 and 1990, in-house training increased by 90 per cent. According to the CBI, companies are now spending some £20 million a year on their own training. Those changes in industrial culture, and in industrial relations structure, are the reason why this country has gained 40 per cent. of the European total of Japanese investment, nearly 50 per cent. of United States investment in Europe and 40 per cent. of investment by other OECD countries. As I believe my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) mentioned earlier, in 1990 alone 62,000 jobs were created by no fewer than 350 individual decisions on foreign investment.

Let us contrast all that with the appalling circumstances of 1979. So far, no hon. Member has mentioned the fact that—sadly—we were known throughout Europe, and especially in the industrial world, for what was described as "the British disease". We were known for that, possibly, more than we were known for anything else. Why? Because the British worker was—probably wrongly—thought by our foreign competitors to be prepared to down tools at the slightest provocation. Red Robbo at Longbridge certainly gave them ample evidence for that supposition.

That is why, in the 1970s, we were losing 13 million days a year through strikes—last year, only about 750,000 were lost. That is why we then had to rely on income policies. The collective bargaining system did not operate effectively and we had to keep the lid on inflation by means of national, centralised control. That is why we experienced demarcation disputes, rigidity and an appalling productivity record.

The villain of the piece—if there was one—was the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1974. Section 14 gave trade unions in the course of trade disputes immunity from tort and conferred on them unique privileges that were not shared by anyone else in the country when they broke contract. Section 13 made trade disputes non-actionable in tort, even where a union interfered with the contract of employment of someone who was not party to a dispute. In other words, in furtherance of a dispute, a union could interfere with the way in which someone else was doing his job and get away with it scot free.

Section 29(c) of the Act defines trade disputes as

"allocation of work or the duties of employment"

of one or more workers. Given that sort of detail, it is small wonder that the demarcation rigidity that was endemic in the 1970s came about.

That was the underpinning of the fossilised state of industrial relations and productivity that we experienced in the 1970s. Again, it is small wonder that, as recent studies have shown between 1974 and 1976, there were no fewer than 5 million jobs from which non-union members were excluded. That does not include all the other jobs where there were not closed shops but nearly effectively closed shops.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Does my hon. Friend agree that these were the very contentions that were struck down by the European Court of Human Rights because they were such a fundamental denial of the liberty of individuals to pursue employment?

Mr. Coombs: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. That is why the Government were right to make a priority of the trade union legislation which they enacted in 1980, 1982, 1984, 1988 and 1990 to loosen those inflexibilities and to give individual members more control of their trade unions and more control over how they went about their legitimate business of making a living for themselves every day of their working lives.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-East said that the one thing employers do not want is more trade union legislation. The one thing that a Labour Government, God forbid, would give them is more trade union legislation. That legislation would not make it easier for them to manage their businesses but would have precisely the opposite effect.

It is no wonder that the Labour party takes that line. When 90 per cent. of the votes at its annual conference are controlled by the trade unions and when 23 members of the shadow Cabinet have trade union sponsorship, it would be staggering if the party acted in any other way. The party is acting in its own interests, as we see from its policy documents. In "Opportunity Britain" it says that it will

"restore the right to take sympathy action."

That is secondary picketing. The trade unions will have a legal right to enforce recognition subject to a certain ballot. We know what the TUC regards as an appropriate ballot, because it said so in a consultation document issued only last year. According to the TUC, if only 40 per cent. of people in a workplace vote for trade union recognition —we can forget about the 80 per cent. now associated with closed shop legislation—trade union recognition will have to be accepted.

The working charter put forward by the Labour party would restore trade union immunity, and all contractual rights of employers and employees would be suspended during industrial action. Although the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) brazenly talked about his support for pre-strike ballots and ballots for union elections, it does not square very well with his comments in the debate on the Trade Union Act 1984 in November 1983, when he said that pre-strike ballots were a scandalous and undemocratic measure against the trade union movement. Either he is turning his back on his trade union friends, in which case he will have something to explain to them, or he has something to explain to the public, who would not

[Mr. Coombs]

be wise to give credibility to someone who can change his mind so easily and in such a slippery way on a fundamental question.

The problem with the trade union reforms likely to be adopted by the Labour party is that the ones that I have mentioned so far, although probably the most far-reaching statutorily, would be but the tip of an unpleasant iceberg in their effect on small businesses and everyday life.

What else has the Labour party in store for people who are trying to run a business and make a living? The first thing is an annual audit of the labour force, with all the bureaucratic administration which that involves. The work force would have to be analysed according to sex, race and disability at least once a year. Firms would have to account to a regional equality tribunal—I thought that we had gone past 1984—which would oversee their personnel policies.

The Labour party also has proposals against race and sex discrimination. It wants positive discrimination—the poppycock talked about in "Meet the Challenge: Make the Change":

> "We must also change the passive nature of our sex and race discrimination laws to require positive action to promote equal rights for women, the black, Asian and other ethnic minority British, and incorporate those EC Directives, (including the obligation to provide parental leave) which promote greater equality".

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): In scorning Labour policy on equality of treatment for employees at work, is the hon. Gentleman saying that it is permissible to discriminate against people on grounds of race or sex? Is he aware of, and does he find acceptable, the lamentable levels of black and Asian workers in skilled jobs and the equally lamentable number of women in senior management posts in industry? If he finds those unacceptable, how would he propose to address the problem?

Mr. Coombs: Of course it is unacceptable to discriminate against people on the grounds of race, sex or the colour of their skin. That goes without saying. What is grossly condescending, and what the Labour party seems to be specialising in increasingly, although there are pockets of resistance among more moderate and sensible Labour councillors, is to say as is its policy that we must take positive action to ensure that one person gets a job ahead of someone else with equal or better qualifications, purely by virtue of the colour of that person's skin or his race. That would be likely to lead to a backlash among people who did not get jobs because of positive discrimination. In addition, it would probably lead to ever more administrative interference. Surprise, surprise—companies would have to report on their positive discrimination policies to something called the women's regional advisory commission.

We would also have a payroll tax which would centralise and bureaucratise training and increase costs. There would be social audit of what the Labour party regarded as major investment decisions, which would further delay the investment which the country so badly needs. There would be enterprise training councils, apparently to be set up not on an industry basis but on a firm-by-firm basis, with all the bureaucracy, additional administration and lack of competitiveness that they would involve.

We would also have the social charter and what my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield referred to as the "Where do I sign?" attitude of the Labour party. The social charter would have a devastating effect on medium-sized carpet companies in my constituency, because it would ultimately contain restrictions on working hours of the 48-hour-week kind, which would remove the flexibility they need to compete in world markets.

My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield dealt with the minimum wage proposal. Like him, I think that it would tend to force out 6 million part-time workers, of whom 90 per cent. want to work only part-time, and would increase costs to British industry enormously, so driving us out of world markets.

I support the improvements planned by the Government. Most of all, I urge the Government to continue, as they have been doing over the last 12 years, to create an environment which would allow more local bargaining and agreements. Some 34 per cent. of agreements are still made nationally, and that percentage is too high. I urge the Government to investigate the activities of pay review bodies which, almost by definition, cannot relate to the circumstances of local labour markets and are therefore inflationary. The Government want to do more for women, who make up 1·7 million of the 2 million extra jobs created over the last 10 years.

Most of all, the Government must recognise that good industrial relations are about Government non-intervention rather than Government intervention, and about leaving employers and employees to bargain with each other and co-operate with each other constructively. This flexibility, which goes with the grain of the new industrial society, is one of the great achievements of the Conservative Government. The Labour party's so-called Pauline conversion in respect of industrial relations policy is paper-thin. It is pretty transparent and unconvincing.

For evidence of that, one has only to look at the testimony of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), the Labour party's transport spokesman, who, referring to Conservative trade union legislation, said:

> "There is nothing you can keep of this legislation . . . It all has to go."

That is the real face of the Labour party. If—God forbid—it should ever get into power, it would have so many bills to pay to its trade union sponsors that anybody who thinks that, in terms of trade union legislation, it would act responsibly is living in cloud cuckoo land. Well, I believe that the British electorate does not live in cloud cuckoo land, and that people will see through the Labour party's blatantly transparent and hypocritical policies.

7.20 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Tonight we are talking about industrial relations. I should like to refer to the industrial relations of some of the companies in my area. In the case of the ferry operator Caledonian MacBrayne, the Secretary of State decided that the board should be changed and the possibility of privatisation considered. The first threat to be levelled at the work force was that the company's headquarters at Gourock, in my constituency, should be moved to Oban.

Was there any attempt to discuss the matter with the local work force? None whatsoever. The managing director of the company was appalled, and I understand that even the board appointed by the Secretary of State for Scotland was appalled. The trade unions contacted me as their parliamentary representative and asked me to do all in my power to prevent such a stupid move. I am glad to say that common sense prevailed.

My point is that such behaviour does not encourage good industrial relations. Debate in society is hardly encouraged when the Secretary of State rides roughshod over workers—in this case, the people who made Caledonian MacBrayne a very good ferry operator. The approach that the Secretary of State adopted was utterly wrong.

Some time ago, British Aerospace announced that the royal ordnance factory in Bishopton, which is also in my constituency, would close and that the decision was irreversible. Closure would have resulted in the loss of 800 jobs. I asked the Secretary of State for Scotland and many other Ministers to intervene to try to make the company see common sense. On the grounds that it was a commercial decision, they declined. Ministers would do nothing to prevent the loss of 800 jobs in my constituency. We put up many arguments to the effect that closure would be nonsense, as the company's products were still very necessary.

I am glad to say that the management and British Aerospace listened to the sensible, loyal, well-organised and disciplined work force, which co-operates through the trade union movement. In fact, the workers in that factory —all of them—are the trade union movement. They work hard. Indeed, they showed the company that they were prepared to work all hours of the day at the wages on offer. They pleaded with the company to reverse its decision. They showed that they had more commitment to the country and to the company than do some of the members of the board.

I am delighted at the sensible steps taken by the trade union leadership. At that time, the factory convenor was Jimmy Burns—an admirable exponent of the right to work and of the right to defend this country. Jimmy Burns believed that closure of that factory would have removed part of the country's defence. The workers put up a magnificent case. In the Falklands war and in the Gulf war, they proved their worth, working 24 hours a day for the country, despite this threat. They did not walk away. Good trade union relationships and a sensible work force produced the result which I described. Through industrial relations legislation such as have been described today, the Government want to throw much of that away. I am delighted to have backed these workers in their fight for their jobs.

I should like now to refer to Reid's, a famous furniture making company in the Renfrewshire area. That company is certainly one of the finest furniture manufacturers in Great Britain, and there is no doubt that its trade union relations are excellent. The company pays good wages and provides very good conditions. All its workers are paid more than £3·45 an hour. The firm does not argue against paying a minimum wage. It believes that we must get people back to work and that the only way to restore their purchasing power is to give them the opportunity to work. Reid's is the Rolls-Royce of the furniture industry, and it competes with the best.

I worked in Rolls-Royce for 14 years. It is another company that pays very decent wages. I do not know many of its employees who work for less than £3·45 an hour —perhaps the Minister has access to such information. Because of the recession, Rolls-Royce is paying workers off. I understand that there are to be 2,000 redundancies —300 of them in Renfrewshire. Workers are sick to the gullet of the continual job losses resulting from the Government's inability to manage our economy. The trade union movement in the Rolls-Royce factory is very responsible. It has made it clear that there is no desire to deal with oddballs here and there. The management find it easier and better to operate in conjunction with the trade union movement.

I have mentioned four companies where the trade union movement has shown more responsibility than have the Government or Ministers. The Opposition amendment asks for support for the European social charter. I have spoken to local Tories about the Government's rejection of this charter. They cannot understand why the Government refuse to support it. As the refusal appalls me, it appalls them. This country's unemployment is rising to record levels; we have record bankruptcies, rising poverty and record house repossessions; we have record and rising crime too. Why? Why? Why? I can give the reason: we have a Government who are bankrupt when it comes to caring and blind to the suffering of our people —a Government living in a fool's paradise.

The Minister's cohorts in Scotland promised every school leaver a training place. It was to be an absolute guarantee. There was no possibility that young people would go on to the dole; they would go straight into training places. What happened to that promise? As with so many other things, what the Government said has proved to be totally false.

What did the Government do in my area when the local enterprise companies were set up? I shall tell the Minister. They cut the training budgets of nearly all the local enterprise companies in Scotland by 33 per cent. I do not want to greet and cry over the job losses which the Government have inflicted on our people, but I do cry and worry when they cut the right to give our people hope for the future by not allowing them to be trained.

The whole country, especially Scotland, faces a dire crisis, but the Government have cut the budgets which give our young people hope. By making those cuts, they also ensured that the training agents and companies went to the wall, thus ensuring that trainers and supervisors—the skilled men and women who were training the young people—also went on to the dole. Their skills have been scrapped and they are no longer contributing to gearing the country for the future. That is what happened in Scotland.

Education gives hope to young unemployed people—indeed, it gives hope to many people. Training gives young people dignity and the hope that they will have the right to a job, but the Government have completely taken away the employment rights of young people in Scotland by savagely reducing the money allocation by 33 per cent.

I heard the Minister say earlier that one man's wage award was another man's job loss. What does the Minister say about redundancies? Law Tex, a company in my area, was closed or liquidated and 120 jobs were lost. Some women had worked there for 11, 13 or 19 years. They worked wholeheartedly and enjoyed their job. Now,

[Mr. Thomas Graham]

through no fault of theirs, the company has gone to the wall. The company says that it went to the wall because of the recession, high interest rates and competition.

That was in August last year. What has happened to the workers since? They have not been given a penny of redundancy money. Letters were sent back and forth between them and the Minister, but all they got was a negative reply, to the effect that the Government were doing this and that with regard to legalities. In those circumstances, when people lose their jobs and are put into poverty, the Government should provide money immediately and then try to get it from the people who should have been paying the workers. The Government should make a positive effort to provide the redundancy money now, not in six months from now. That six-month delay has been a further damaging blow because of the recession caused by the Government. I plead with the Minister to give these people their redundancy money now.

Let us consider companies which are into not golden or diamond but platinum handshakes, while the poor workers in Law Tex cannot get their redundancy money through no fault of their own. The Law Tex employees worked to give that company a future. They hear about people making millions of pounds out of failures. Burton's Cooklin was paid about £1 million for running the company. The sum at Granada was £580,000, while Saatchi's Warman received £1·1 million and Isosceles' Smith more than £1 million. They are platinum handshakes for failures. It is unbelievable and it makes me want to greet, but they have cried all the way to the bank while my people starve in poverty and misery.

Let us consider another company in Scotland. The chairmen of the privatised Scottish Power awarded themselves a rise of £47,000. I shall be interested to hear what the Minister has to say about that rise, because there was an article about it in a Glasgow newspaper. The chief executive of Scottish Power was given a rise of £96,000. These are mind-boggling sums. I have never seen £96,000 in my life, except written down. In 1991, the chief executive of Scottish Hydro-Electric gave himself an extra £89,000 —a 120 per cent. pay rise. By the way, the Secretary of State for Scotland has done nothing.

These levels of pay awards are obscene when people in Scotland are dying of starvation. I can give the Minister the facts and figures. There are people on the streets of London who are dying from hypothermia, of drug taking and of general deterioration caused by their inability to get a job in Scotland and being forced to come down here, desperate for work. They are dying in the streets and I should like to know how many have died during the cold weather that we have suffered in the past few days. When unemployment is raging and rocketing, it is obscene that some people are awarding themselves wages rises which are unbelievable and belong to a fantasy world—it is like getting that one in a million coupon.

I worked at a factory bench for Rolls-Royce for 14 years. Many times I suffered financial hardship, even though I had a wage. I found it difficult to pay electricity and gas bills and rent. I had the pipe dream that everyone has of buying a coupon and having it come up. I used to think about winning £75,000. What would I do with £75,000? I would instantly buy myself a nice wee house and go on holiday to Benidorm, which would be fantastic. I would buy myself a wee car. That was the dream. Is the Minister listening? Some people are already living in the dream world for which other people have worked, and they are ripping off the workers. Companies are going bankrupt and failing, yet people are taking money from them. By doing so, they are putting jobs in jeopardy.

I could go further. The Government have made many blunders, but the biggest was trying to hoodwink the people of Britain by saying that the social charter was not good for them and that everything in it was bad news. They should tell that to one of my constituents who worked for Coulport and Faslane as a security guard earning £1·85 an hour. That would not buy a pint in London, but that man was expected to bring up his family on it. In addition, he had absolutely no rights—when his partner did not turn up for work, perhaps because of illness, he was asked whether he wanted to do a double shift. If the next partner did not turn up for work, he was told to work a treble shift. All that had to be done for £1·85 an hour.

That man had absolutely no rights—it was a matter of "take it or leave it—get out of the factory now." He had no rights and no wages. None of us here could call £1·85 an hour for a man who had a family and who had served for 20 years in our armed forces a proper wage. It is unbelievable that any Minister could condone working on such poverty wages. That man had no trade union rights; he had nothing.

I met that man and he was a bag of nerves. He eventually had to give up his job because he was mugged in Faslane. The company running the security guards broke every rule in the book. I will provide the information so that the Secretary of State can check up and perhaps stop the company breaking every rule in the book. The one rule that the company did not break was the low pay rule.

I am delighted that there is one trade union that is bucking the trend—the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. It is getting new members, and it is one of the unions in the forefront of fighting against low pay, and of fighting for the minimum wage and for the right of people to be able to eat and to heat themselves in the winter. It is fighting to ensure that the work force have a salary or a wage, and a right to a living. I am delighted to back that union by which I am sponsored. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] Ah. For the record, I do not get any money. The money goes to the constituency Labour party. The £700 that the union gives each year is used to ensure that people like us can come here. There are no big bucks coming from the people I spoke about earlier. They get £1 million as a pay-off for almost bankrupting a company.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Given that there is such controversy about the extra-curricular financing of Members of Parliament and given that my hon. Friend has told us that any money he receives, which I imagine is less than £1,000 a year, is passed immediately to his constituency party, can he give me one example of a Conservative Member—my hon. Friend knows that many of them have up to 20 or 30 directorships and earn hundreds or thousands of pounds a year—who passes his money either to his constituency party or to a charitable cause?

Mr. Graham: The Minister may need to set up a training school to instruct Tory Members on how to pass

back some of that money. I do not know of any examples. We know that the Greeks have given the Tories money. Although the Tory party tries to deny it, we know that it has received foreign money for years.

Trade unions are a valid part of this nation. If we want to work our way back to full employment, we must work together. The institutions of government, the trade unions and the colleges of education must work their way back to full employment. We must manufacture to survive. We cannot always have the policies of confrontation which the Government advocate. We must invest in manufacturing and we must not use "commercial decisions" as an excuse. We must invest far more in training than the Government have attempted to do, and we must invest in our people. We must ensure that they have a decent health service and decent housing, and we must ensure that they have a right to live.

We must prepare our young people for the worldwide challenge against poverty and homelessness. We must equip them with the tools and education. I shall be glad to give way if the Secretary of State wants to intervene. I believe that this country has not invested in its young people. I ask the Secretary of State to come with me to my constituency and to meet the young unemployed. They are decent young men and women who want the right that the Secretary of State has to receive a good salary, and who want to be able to buy the things that his family can buy. The people of my area are not beggars and they do not ask for charity; they demand their rights. The Government are here to work for the people, not to destroy them.

The other night I met one of the senior citizens of my area. His point to me was clear. He said, "Tommy, I am glad that I have come to the end of my days. My father fought for this country in the first world war, I fought for this country in the second world war and my son fought for this country in other wars. My grandchildren are now unemployed and hospitals have long waiting lists."

Unemployment is a scourge. I am delighted that the battleground of an election is now emerging. It will give the Government a big kick. We shall kick the ball, and the Government will be right off course. The people in Scotland, in England and in Wales will get rid of this Government—there is nothing surer. By doing that, our young people will be able to fight for a future. We will get them educated and trained, and we will take on the world. This country will beat the world, because our people have the capacity. They will get rid of this Government and, thank goodness, this is probably the last time that we shall hear the Secretary of State speak this term.

7.46 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I will not attempt to follow the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham).

I am sorry that the Secretary of State is just departing. He did not hear the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), who heavily criticised him for going back in history in his opening speech. I noticed that the hon. Gentleman mentioned Lloyd George no fewer than three times. He very much delved into the scrap-book of history when he criticised my right hon. and learned Friend. His speech was like one from an 18th-century edition of *Reader's Digest*.

When I questioned the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland, who is the Chief Whip for the Liberal Democrats, about why they advocated regional pay bargaining, but would abolish the ability of trust hospitals to negotiate their own pay structures, he refused to answer. I conclude that he is not so much a Chief Whip, more a feather duster. The last time the Liberal party formed a Government, Horatio Nelson was still able to clap.

The motion says that the Opposition's policies would

"destroy employment opportunities, threaten public services, and cause inward investors to take their investment and jobs elsewhere."

They could.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Employment will remember that, under the previous Labour Government, we had to go to the bank to sign a little form on the back of our passports to get £50 with which to go abroad. We were not allowed to take any more. If we committed the heinous crime of booking a holiday in Italy, we had to apply to the Royal Automobile Club or to the Automobile Association for vouchers for petrol. Petrol was so expensive in Italy that £50 was not enough to allow for a motoring holiday there. So the Labour Government had a marvellous arrangement of a voucher system with the motoring organisations.

The Labour party seems to have completely missed the fact that, with the deregulations in 1992, all British people will have the right to reside anywhere in the European Community, and to take their bank balance, their company headquarters and their capital with them. Labour's taxation policies would produce the greatest exodus from Britain that the nation has ever seen, because they would make us an uncompetitive tax regime.

So when Opposition Members tell us about policies of investment in industry, my hon. Friends on the Front Bench should highlight to the British electorate Labour's taxation policies. There would be a great exodus if Labour ever got its hands on the Exchequer purse and raised taxation to the penal levels that it advocates.

However, I have no wish to debate Labour's taxation policies this evening. The motion says that the Opposition's policies would "threaten public services". During the winter of discontent, we saw the greatest breakdown of law and order among trade union membership that Britain has ever seen. A leading part was played by NALGO in that.

I was interested to find that during the 1987 general election NALGO played a part in my election campaign. The union called a public meeting and complained that I was not present at it. That was hardly surprising, because I knew nothing of it. It then wrote to all its members and the councillors of all three councils informing them that I had refused to come to a meeting. By dint of reply to this great debate, I requisitioned a special meeting of the Isle of Wight county council. We held it on a Saturday morning. The chairman of the council complained that I had requisitioned a special meeting of the council to debate the actions of NALGO. That could not have come as much of a surprise because he was also a member of NALGO. However, he said that he had taken no part in the decision of NALGO to write to all councillors and all its members complaining of my action.

I wanted to make that point to my hon. Friends because at that time there was an injunction against NALGO on behalf of several Conservative councillors. Subsequently, NALGO's 1987 election campaign was found to have been out of order. Sir Nicolas Browne-Wilkinson ruled that

[Mr. Barry Field]

NALGO posters in 125 marginals breached electoral law. They should have come under the spending of the agent of the non-Conservative candidates in those marginals.

At that time, NALGO did not have a political fund. In 1988, 51·8 per cent. of the members of NALGO voted to set up a political fund. Tonight I hope to speak for the 48 per cent. who did not. NALGO has just launched a £2 million election campaign. I note that, when the office of the Leader of the Opposition was challenged about the part that the Labour party was playing in NALGO's campaign, it retorted that the campaign had

"as much to do with us as the Institute of Directors".

That point is that the Institute of Directors does not pay £2 million for national advertisements which seek to overthrow a democratically elected Government. The Institute of Directors does not run our polling stations. The Institute of Directors does not make decisions about the investment of taxpayers' money. The Institute of Directors is not employed and paid for with taxpayers' and charge payers' money and business rates, whereas, of course, NALGO is.

Recently we have seen two advertisements in the national papers from NALGO. One talks about the classrooms. The one that I have with me is from *The Independent*. The bottom line of the advertisement says:

"You can choose a better future. Make sure you do. NALGO."

The other advertisement has a picture——

Mr. Clelland: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seem to recall that on one occasion last week when one of my hon. Friends raised a piece of paper in demonstration, he was told by Mr. Speaker that he was out of order. Yet the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) seems to be getting away with it scot free.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The position is that visual aids have been deprecated by Mr. Speaker, but in this case, if I understand correctly, the hon. Gentleman is quoting from a newspaper cutting. That is in order.

Mr. Field: You are absolutely right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was quoting from the advertisment which I am holding right here. It shows an elderly lady sitting in front of a fire. In the fire is the citizens charter. She is saying:

"The Citizen's Charter? Oh yes, very useful."

Again at the bottom NALGO says:

"You can choose a better future. Make sure you do."

I also have here a full-page advertisement by the Isle of Wight couty council which appeared in my local press last week. It cost £1,200. It talked about the Government's capping limit. As I hope to demonstrate in a while, there is a definite connection between NALGO and the way in which local government disports itself and the Liberal Democrats who, of course, have never voted against local government trade unions. The reason why the Liberal Democrats have never voted against local government unions, whether in Liverpool or the Isle of Wight, is that they are not a political party but power brokers. That is their role in life. I believe that they are mesmerised by public service unions. They never face up to the unions.

Liverpool is a case in point. The Labour party came to an agreement with the Liberal Democrats about the budget. At the budget-fixing meeting the Liberal Democrats reneged on that agreement because it would have meant redundancies in the public sector unions in Liverpool. They never face up to their responsibilities.

The remarkable advertisement in the *Isle of Wight County Press* last week, costing £1,200 of Isle of Wight charge payers' money, has a remarkable similarity with the NALGO advertisements in the national press. That shows the definite connection between the Liberal Democrats and NALGO in their anti-Government propaganda.

Later tonight we will debate a motion on the additional grant report for England. I hope that I shall have the opportunity to draw my hon. Friends' attention to the advertisement to which I referred and some literature presented by the Isle of Wight county council. It appears to offend against the Local Government Act 1986 on the prohibition of political publicity. If I have been informed correctly, it might be possible to prosecute Isle of Wight county council for distributing such literature.

We have heard a great deal tonight from hon. Members on both sides of the House about trade unions and their role in modern society. I believe that the Government have given trade unions back to their members. The Government have allowed trade unionists to take part in ballots to choose their leaders. We now have much healthier arrangements for organised labour than Britain has ever had before. However, particularly in the public sector, some trade unions are still organised for political purposes and not for the defence of their members' interests.

I shall give the House an illustration of what I mean. I attended a protest meeting organised by the Liberal Democrats in conjunction with the National Union of Public Employees, the Confederation of Health Service Employees and NALGO outside our new £30 million stainless steel national health service hospital, which was built by a caring Conservative Government on the Isle of Wight. The NALGO representative turned up. I asked him whether he believed in national pay bargaining. He said, "We have always defended national pay bargaining in NALGO." I asked him whether he could tell me, if that was the case, why he had never once criticised the Liberal Democrats for having a regional pay bargaining policy. With that, the deputy leader of the Isle of Wight county council put his arm around him and said, "We are not here to discuss that," and moved him off.

There ought to be a health warning with NALGO membership. As has been clearly demonstrated by those quite nasty advertisements in national newspapers, when one joins NALGO one is joining a political party and not an organisation to defend one's interests.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) told us one of the reasons why we have fewer industrial disputes and fewer days lost. Opposition Members said that it was a result of unemployment. I do not believe that. One of the principal reasons why we have fewer industrial disputes is the success of the Government in privatisation and allowing employees of privatised industries to purchase shares, often at an advantageous rate, and to invest in the companies in which they create the wealth.

When I heard Liberal Democrats say tonight that they believe in a partnership between employees and employers, and greater disclosure among the work force, I remembered that they opposed every privatisation issue in

the House. They opposed workers obtaining a shareholding in the capital of the companies which employ them. It is disgraceful that they should try to make political capital out of the reforms that the Government have introduced.

I am pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State decided to convince the Government that we should hold this debate, because I know that he knows of my concern about the role that NALGO played in my election in 1987. I am pleased that my representations have led to the debate so that we can mention those matters on behalf of the 48 per cent. of NALGO members who did not vote for a political fund and on behalf of many council employees on the Isle of Wight who have been disturbed about NALGO's actions. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will take a personal interest——

Mr. Watson: The hon. Gentleman has been talking at great length about NALGO. It is a great shame that he did not make his remarks earlier when Mr. Max Smith, the Scottish regional secretary of NALGO, was in the Gallery. Perhaps he could have had a discussion with him afterwards about those events. Will he confirm that, although 48 per cent. voted against the political fund, presumably 52 per cent. voted in favour? Will he give his view of what constitutes a majority—is it the Churchillian version, or has it something to do with the Isle of Wight which the rest of us do not know about?

Mr. Field: I am interested to hear that the hon. Gentleman wanted me to make my remarks when the Scottish secretary of NALGO was present. I know that the Isle of Wight moves about a bit in a heavy gale and it tends to rock, but it has not yet come under the Scottish Office. Who knows—there may be a little movement yet. Perhaps that is what the Labour party has in mind for devolution for Scotland—perhaps it includes the Isle of Wight. Who knows?

Mr. Watson: What constitutes a majority?

Mr. Field: To answer his question, the hon. Gentleman is not quite correct. I rounded the figures up, in favour of NALGO—51·8 per cent. of NALGO members decided to have a political fund. I wonder how many of them will be voting for a political fund when they see these advertisements—which I quoted earlier—which say that the British electorate should be looking for a change of Government. Those are advertisements on behalf of a publicly funded trade union. Money is paid to it by the charge payers and taxpayers of the country. That is political propaganda at the taxpayers' and the electors' expense.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Outrageous.

Mr. Field: It is disgraceful. I cannot tell the House how pleased I am that the Government have acceded to my request to hold this debate, so that I could air my concerns about the part which NALGO played in my election in 1987. I look forward to hearing what plans they have for the forthcoming election.

8.4 pm

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): First, it is appropriate that I should declare my membership of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, from which I receive no sponsorship. I am proud to be associated with that union, as a member, because of the skills and talents of its work force in the steel industry. We know that that industry has recently been devastated by the further loss of many jobs because of the decision on Ravenscraig.

I am supported in my endeavours in Parliament through the Labour and Co-operative party. I am a co-operator and therefore I receive support, not for myself, but for my constituents, who also believe in the world of co-operation.

A comparison between the Secretary of State's speech at the beginning of the debate and the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), speaking for the Labour party, showed clearly that the Government have run out of ideas and have to resort to the old and outdated confrontational argument of the 1970s—in the modern idiom, bashing the trade unions. That finds no resonance in this country now.

If we contrast the Secretary of State's speech to the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield, we realise that modern, progressive ideas on employment, training and industrial relations emanate from the Labour party. I have some sympathy for the Secretary of State for unemployment, since it is a difficult task to persuade us of the success of his employment and training policies when he reigns over a real unemployment level of 3·25 million, by his own admission. If one takes into account the changes which have been made—there have been so many in the past decade——

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Thirty.

Mr. Turner: The Government have made 30 changes to manipulate the true level of unemployment. Training and enterprise councils are struggling to respond to training demands identified in most parts of the country. They are suffering as a result of insufficient resources.

A further practical difficulty arises for the Secretary of State. A recent survey of his popularity, which I took among employers in my constituency shows—if the results are widespread—that his credibility is in need of a gigantic boost, since he ranks at the bottom as the most unpopular member of a most unpopular Cabinet, who look ever more washed out and tired compared with the freshness, the energy and the ideas emanating from my Labour Front-Bench colleagues. There they are, to be seen and to be heard.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): What is the hon. Gentleman reading?

Mr. Turner: I am not reading.

Mr. Barry Field: Talking of dynamism, I understand that 156 of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues are sponsored by trade unions, unlike him . One wonders where the other 150 are tonight, if they are so dynamic and so incensed at the Government's trade union reforms.

Mr. Turner: I imagine that, like Conservative Members, they are busy in Committees or working on behalf of Parliament, as we would expect. However, my hon. Friends to whom the hon. Gentleman referred are all very proud to belong to trade unions.

The Prime Minister appears to have adopted the maxim "make the world go away" or, at least, "let it take the blame". It is worth repeating, because it has been referred to in the debate, that it was the Prime Minister who said,

[Mr. Turner]

"If it isn't hurting, it isn't working." In Wolverhampton, unemployment is definitely hurting. In parts of Wolverhampton, it stands at more than 20 per cent., with all the misery and hardship that that brings.

I do not wish to be patronising, but unless Conservative hon. Members have experienced unemployment, they cannot begin to understand the feeling of lack of confidence that unemployment brings. They will not be able to appreciate the demands of living in a society without the independence that a wage packet or a salary cheque provides. One needs to experience that to understand what it means. Millions of people are suffering those problems. I hope that the Government will recognise the heartlessness of their policies and the damage that they have done to those human beings who are unemployed.

Much has been said in the debate about the 1970s. To many people in my area, the 1970s were halcyon days. Then, unemployment stood at 2 per cent.; today it stands at more than 20 per cent.

Mr. Forth: What?

Mr. Turner: Yes, in a large part of my constituency, 20 per cent. of the work force are unemployed.

In Wolverhampton and Bilston, the Government have put great store on the training and enterprise councils, TECs, to deliver the youth and adult training programmes. In Wolverhampton, 20,000 young people and adult citizens are waiting to receive training or retraining. Our TEC is knocking on the door of the Government or the central Exchequer to obtain more money to fulfil the training demands of the unemployed. The Minister smiles when I tell him that, in large parts of my constituency, unemployment is 20 per cent. but it is more than that in some areas. That is also true in the neighbouring constituency of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Hicks).

The trade union movement in Britain has actively represented the aspirations of working people for longer than the inaptly termed "modern" Conservative party has governed. Trade unionism still remains a central pillar of a democratic society such as ours. Trade unions have been attacked and undermined by this reactionary, Conservative Government in the 1980s, who would continue such attacks in the 1990s if they had their way. But the Government will not have their way.

I have a few chosen words of which it is worth reminding the unemployed and the employed:

"Shall you complain who feed the world—who clothe the world, who house the world of what the world might do? Then rise as you have never rose before or dared before or hoped before and show as you have never showed before—the power that lies in you!"

The power lies in the people the Labour party speaks for. They will be shown how to use that power on 9 April, at the general election.

The Government's direct policy of unemployment, which has been used against working people in the 1980s, will be swept away. We shall replace this Government with a Government who care and who will build up the economy. We will give people the confidence to believe that they will have a real job and a wage packet and the confidence and the belief that they have a Government who want to look after their interests. In a few weeks, the people of this country will sweep away this Government and replace them with a Labour one.

8.14 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner). I found that I agreed with at least one thing he said, when he referred to the obvious contrast between the speeches of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair).

Hon. Members are aware that they are both exceedingly intelligent, eloquent and able Members of the House. The hon. Member for Sedgefield is the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman on an enormously important subject—we all recognise its importance. One might have expected that the hon. Gentleman would have rejoiced in the opportunity today to spell out to the House, and through us to the electorate, his policies for the forthcoming election. He could have explained those policies in great detail, and the consequences of their implementation. Instead, exactly the reverse occurred. Since I became a Member of the House, I cannot recall a speech on major policy delivered with less confidence by a spokesman of the two major parties than that from the hon. Gentleman today.

I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is not present, but he left the Chamber when I began to speak. On reflection, he might be pleased that he was not here to listen to my remarks. The hon. Gentleman seemed to run away from every opportunity to refer to the Labour party's policies on industrial relations. He notably failed to begin to address the several challenges which were thrown at him by my right hon. and learned Friend.

The hon. Gentleman evaded my question about which specific employment Acts or trade union Acts passed by this Administration since 1979 he would repeal and which he would retain. He seemed to find that question an extremely embarrassing one, and he failed to answer it. He also failed to answer the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), who wanted to know which strikes the Labour party had either disowned or failed to support in the past 13 years. Answer came there absolutely none. We were met by a blank silence or by a stream of immediate irrelevancies. The hon. Gentleman evidently wanted to speak about anything but anything, rather than the Opposition's policies on industrial relations and trade union law.

As we are all in the politics business, we can feel some sympathy with the hon. Member for Sedgefield in his obvious discomfort and embarrassment this afternoon. He finds himself in an extremely difficult position, for Labour Members know that not only were industrial relations in the days when they were in office a shambles, but they were a byword throughout the globe for industrial anarchy. They recognise that that shambles played no mean part in the deserved defeat to which the Callaghan Government went down in 1979.

Hence, the hon. Member for Sedgefield knows that there can be no political mileage in saying frankly, "We did that in the past. Vote for us this time, electors, and we will reproduce that shambles for you again." No doubt there is also an element of wounded personal pride, but there may be another, more sinister, element. The close links between

trade unions and Labour Members have been referred to many times in the debate. Whatever the reason, it is clear that Labour Members find it impossible to put a brave face on it and say, "We recognise that the Conservatives have solved what was becoming an insoluble problem and a major incubus on the economy in the 1960s and 1970s."

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I understand that the hon. Gentleman is a director of Dewe Rogerson Ltd. My hon. Friends and I are up-front about our relationship with trade unions. I am sponsored by the Graphical, Paper and Media Union, the printing trade union, and I am not in any way, shape or form ashamed of that. But I derive no pecuniary advantage or direct personal interest from that relationship.

I believe that, as a director, the hon. Gentleman derives some paid interest. Will he explain how that influences his behaviour in the House? Given the large amount of corruption that we have witnessed in the City recently—the number of firms involved in the most dubious, even criminal, practices—may I ask if his relationship with the private sector has led him to fail to put pressure on the Government to do something about that kind of sleaze?

Mr. Davies: I hope that I did not detect in that intervention a slur against Conservative Members in general. I have continued to practice, albeit on a part-time basis, the profession that I exercised before joining the House. This place has always consisted of people of all trades and professions elected by their peers to represent them, at least for a time. Far from there ever having been any reason why people elected here should not continue—at any rate, in the limited time possible once they were elected here—to practise those professions, they contribute greatly to the wealth of the experience and variety of knowledge on which the House can draw.

I would not dream of using the word "corruption"—the hon. Gentleman used that word—in relation to a trade union retaining Labour Members. When the Labour party began, hon. Members were not paid and it was essential, if there were to be Labour Members here, for trade unions to raise political funds. Until Members were paid, Labour members were often remunerated directly by trade unions. Since then, that money has often gone not into the individual Member's pocket but to the constituency. Even so, the interest of the Member is served by those payments being made, and it is right for Labour Members, on feeling that their relationship with a trade union is relevant to the debate, to have mentioned that.

I have often declared my interest. I do not feel that there is any private business interest of mine that is specifically germane to this debate. I have never been an employee or director of a unionised company. The companies with which I have been associated have, generally speaking, had extremely happy labour relations and have been successful, not least because of that.

I well understand that I may have touched some delicate and sensitive nerves, and I happily give warning to Labour Members that I shall proceed on that course, because certain things need to be said, some of which may not be pleasant for them to hear. Labour Members find themselves in an impossible position. They cannot defend their record on industrial relations when they were in power. They cannot tell the British public that they wish to reintroduce that model of industrial anarchy and have the slightest chance of being elected.

But whether out of wounded pride or because of their attachment to the interest of trade unions—or for some other reason—Labour Members find it impossible to recognise the tremendous achievement of the Conservatives since 1979, even though it is recognised internationally. There is no doubt that we have moved forward from the industrial shambles which was a pre-eminent example of chaos and bad industrial relations, to the remarkably happy strike record that we have had since then, and to the substantial advances in productivity throughout industry that have been at the basis of the prosperity and growth which we enjoyed during the 1980s and which, under Conservative rule, we shall continue to enjoy in the 1990s.

What are Labour Members to do in those circumstances? They pretend that there is some third course, that they have a valid and coherent alternative to the other models. They are also anxious to ensure that nobody looks too closely at the new model, because it is fundamentally flawed and fraudulent. So whenever people ask detailed questions about it, the technique of Labour Members is to deflect them with irrelevancies. Anybody reading the *Official Report* of the debate must reach that conclusion.

I appreciate that my remarks may not be welcome to Labour Members, but they are thoroughly deserved, and it is no use them trying to bamboozle the House or the British public into believing that they have a formula for industrial peace when they are committed to restoring secondary picketing and secondary strikes. They cannot possibly bamboozle people into believing that they have a commitment to secret ballots, as the modern Labour party pretends it has, if employees and employers will be deprived of any effective redress in the event of the secret ballot being abused or its results being ignored.

An important aspect of Labour's proposals must be underlined in this debate. I refer to the plan to remove the redress of ex parte injunction from suits that arise as a result of some future putative Labour party trade union law. Anyone with knowledge of industrial relations knows that the damage done by a strike occurs rapidly. As each day, even hours, proceeds, millions, even hundreds of millions of pounds may be lost. It is therefore essential that, if people are to have an effective means of redress, they are able to get an ex parte injunction so that a court can order that the dispute be suspended, that the strike be called off and that normality be restored while the court is examining the substantive issue before it.

If one says, as the Labour party is now saying, that it will remove that possibility of seeking an ex parte injunction, it is a nefarious attempt to subvert the effect of accepting secret ballots. Once people are deprived of a redress against the breach of the law, they may as well not have had that law in the first place.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): The hon. Gentleman is arguing that all strikes are unlawful or illegal. Will he define the circumstances under which he sees a strike to be lawful and valid?

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman has not been following my argument. I am saying that the Labour party pretends that is is now committed to the principle of a secret ballot, and that that claim is nothing but a pretence. If the Labour party intends to remove the only effective redress for employees or employers—if there were no secret ballots or if that secret ballot procedure were abused

[Mr. Davies]

—and if a strike was called, it would be essential that an employer, or employee who did not wish to strike and whose rights were thereby being threatened, could go to a court and say that that was unfair and against the law and obtain some effective redress. If he were deprived of the ex parte injunction route, he would be unable to have a redress because, by the time the court had considered the substantive issue, days, weeks or even months may have gone by and the damage would have been done.

I shall repeat my argument because some Opposition Members may benefit from the repetition. To deprive a citizen of redress if the law is breached is tantamount to depriving him of that law in the first place.

The situation is even worse. The Labour party will never succeed in bamboozling the House or the country if it pretends that trade unions are to be brought under the law, like every other citizen, but then set up a separate special court to judge trade union disputes, or disputes involving trade unions. If trade unions are to be brought within the ambit of the law, why set up a separate court? Why not subject trade unions to the same courts of the land as the rest of us? There is mischief in that proposal.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman obviously has a deep fixation with the trade union movement. The employer would also have access to the same courts. Furthermore, it may surprise the hon. Gentleman to know that a range of existing legal processes do not rely on the ordinary court mechanism. For instance, industrial tribunals, mechanisms for conciliation and even small claims courts are all low-cost processes outside the ambit of the normal legal process.

When the hon. Gentleman was making his interesting point about the incompetence of the legal system and the fact that it takes so long for ordinary people to obtain justice, he should have referred his question to the Lord Chancellor rather than using it to criticise the trade union movement, which is one of the victims of that incompetence.

Mr. Davies: Here we go again—I ask a question and the hon. Gentleman intervenes not to answer my question but to ask me a series of questions on an unrelated topic. He has not answered my fundamental question: if trade unions under a putative future Labour Government would be subject to the law like other citizens, why would they not be subject to the same courts? Why set up a separate court? Why should one court deal with matters involving trade unions, and other courts deal with everyone else?

Mr. Ian Bruce: I am sorry that my hon. Friend did not get an answer from the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd), because he could have read from his document that sets out Labour's options for Britain. The Labour party does not want to use the same courts because those special courts will not be allowed to sequestrate the assets of a trade union if that interferes with the trade union's normal operation, like paying members' benefits. As we know, the funds are being used fully for that purpose. Nothing in the document says that that special court will not be able to put total punitive damages on an employer and perhaps even put him out of business.

Mr. Davies: My hon. Friend has anticipated the next point in my speech. While I am always sorry to lose a few good sentences in a speech, I am more than grateful to my hon. Friend, because he put that point with greater eloquence than I could have done.

Not only is there a separate court but, as any intelligent man or woman would guess after a few minutes' reflection, there is a mischievous and nefarious purpose behind that facade. The intention is precisely as described by my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce). It is that the special court would not have the same powers as ordinary courts of the land to enforce contracts—contracts that would be enforced on the hon. Member for Stretford or me should we have a dispute under the law of the land.

Mr. Illsley: We are having difficulty in following the hon. Gentleman. If he thinks back to the 1970s, he will remember that a Conservative Government brought in the Industrial Relations Act 1971 which provided for industrial courts. Those were special courts at which large fines were imposed on trade unions during that period. Did that Conservative Government during the 1970s have the same nefarious purpose?

Mr. Davies: The obfuscation is becoming more sophisticated. We are now being led back into history. We are being led back to before the threshold of my political memory. We shall soon be discussing Ramsay Macdonald, George Lansbury, Keir Hardie or the Tolpuddle martyrs. We shall soon be back in ancient Rome, and we shall be here all night as a result. I am sure, Madame Deputy Speaker, that you would not wish me to return to those historical matters. Suffice it to say that that way of dealing with my question and avoiding the essence of my argument was particularly ingenious, and I happily pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for that.

Mr. Illsley: Conservative Members have been referring throughout this debate to an era of industrial relations from 1976 to 1979—13 years ago. There is not much difference between the Industrial Relations Act 1971 and that era of 1976. Therefore, I am not going far back into history.

Mr. Davies: I have already referred to the antediluvian period before 1979 as having represented a model for an anarchy in industrial relations. That model was noted around the globe, because everybody and anybody interested in designing a modern system of industrial relations wanted to avoid the mistakes that Great Britain had made during that period.

Mr. Illsley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman two or three times, and I must continue with my remarks, discomfiting and unwelcome though they may sometimes be to Opposition Members.

Another question on which Opposition Members have no chance of bamboozling Conservative Members or the electorate is how anyone could claim to have the faintest understanding of industrial management and yet propose a policy that would make it illegal to sack a striking worker. That would lead to manifest absurdity. Anyone who felt that he would be dismissed, even for the best reasons, would presumably immediately go on strike. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members do not seem to like that assertion, but I refer the hon. Gentleman to page 34

of the Labour party's document, "Looking to the Future", with a Labour rose on the cover, which expounds that ill-conceived policy.

Most importantly, there is no way that anyone can sustain a claim to be commited to economic sanity if, at a time of unemployment, he or she takes the crazy course of devising and introducing new policies, the only certain effect of which—as night follows day—is to increase unemployment still further. Recessions always bring high unemployment, and I assure Opposition Members that I feel just as much for my constituents who face the horror of losing their jobs and the enormous anxiety about how long they will have to wait before they find new ones, as do Opposition Members for their constituents. A further increase in unemployment would be the certain effect of a national minimum wage.

Opposition Members are shaking their heads, but if they took a correspondence course in elementary economics, they would discover that, if one increases the price of anything, one reduces demand for it. If we increase the price of labour, we shall reduce demand for it. The introduction of a national minimum wage will abolish a range of jobs. In this country, people are particularly conscious of wage differentials. That may be good or bad —we could argue about it—but it is one of the institutional and cultural facts of this country. The knock-on effect—wage inflation—of a national minimum wage would be particularly disastrous.

If Opposition Members do not want to take the time or trouble of doing a correspondence course in basic economics, I can suggest something that may be more congenial to them. They should take a short trip to France —a civilised country which I am sure all hon. Members enjoy visiting. It has had a socialist Government since 1981, who operate a national minimum wage, called the SMIC. It has resulted in France having one of the highest unemployment rates in Europe. Hon. Members have already commented that we entered the recession earlier than the French, but the French have had a higher unemployment rate all the way through. If Opposition Members took a few trips to France, they could ponder the subject.

Not content with wanting a national minimum wage, Opposition Members continually urge Ministers to subscribe to the social chapter which came out of Maastricht. Once again, such action would reduce employment in this country. It would reduce the employment of people working overtime or longer hours, and reduce the number of part-time employees, who play such an enormously important role in the economy and for whom part-time employment is often the ideal way of working and meeting family commitments.

What, Madam Deputy Speaker, would you make of a party which, at a time of high unemployment, could do nothing better than devise policies designed further to increase unemployment? I know what I make of such a party, and I know what the British electorate will make of such a party in a few weeks' time.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I apologise to my hon. Friends who I know wish to tear to pieces the arguments that we have just heard. I waited for a natural break in the speeches.

You, Madam Deputy Speaker, have special responsibility for aspects of parliamentary democracy in the House and a special responsibility to ensure that the procedures operate correctly. There are other aspects of parliamentary democracy, such as the franchise, which I have pursued many times. I have collected from the board an answer from the Department of Health. I asked for the size of the 1992 electoral register which came into operation on Sunday. An answer to one of my previous questions stated that electoral registration officers were asked to submit information by Sunday to the Department of Health so that the figures could be collected. The answer stated:

"The size of the 1992 electoral register is not yet known."

I shall not receive a holding answer until the figures given have been calculated. However, as a Member of Parliament, I have been informed that the information is not available. This is a matter of great urgency because soon, perhaps within a matter of days, a general election might be announced, and we must know, at least the total number of the electorate in England and Wales, if not the figures constituency by constituency. I seek your advice on the ways in which the Government can be made to give information to the House, as hon. Members and, indeed, the nation require those facts.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): That is hardly a point of order for the Chair now, but I have noted the matter, as, no doubt, have those on the Treasury Bench.

8.45 pm

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): It would be inappropriate to begin my speech without reference to the rather confused ramblings of the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) who gave, inter alia, a selective view of history when he referred to the 1970s. He made much reference to the Labour Government of that period, but he refused to mention the industrial relations legislation introduced by the Conservative Government between 1970 and 1974 which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) said, made provision for the special courts that the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding seems to find so distasteful now.

The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding suggested that his view of history would go back as far as the Tolpuddle martyrs. He has perhaps stirred the feelings of the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce), who is waiting to speak, and who might tell us what his constituents feel about the grand traditions of those men who, 150 years ago, went to prison—some even to Australia—for their attempts to form trade unions.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Those people were not quite in my constituency, but they do represent a great tradition, followed by the Conservative party. It is interesting that the industrial relations of the previous Conservative Government of whom we have talked were almost as bad as those of previous Labour Governments, which is why the present Government have been so staunchly correcting matters step by step. It is also why Conservative Members are so amazed that Opposition Members should want to interfere in the current industrial peace in this country.

Mr. Watson: It is a matter not of interfering but of re-establishing a balance within industrial relations—which we are supposed to be debating.

[Mr. Watson]

I was referring to the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding and his selective view of history. He used a technique that his hon. Friends consistently employ—he referred to the 1974 to 1979 period, but never to earlier industrial relations, which also have relevance to the debate.

One aspect of the hon. Gentleman's speech that I did not understand was that he seemed to think that the Labour party's proposals on industrial relations—that someone cannot be sacked for going on strike—would be used as a device by employees who felt that their jobs were threatened and who would simply walk out of the door. Britain is the only country in western Europe whose people do not have, and never have had, a legal right to strike. The only right that has existed is a collective one. An individual cannot be dismissed for taking strike action; all employees have to be dismissed. As we have seen at Wapping and other places, if an employer chooses to dismiss all employees, he can get away with it. He could not get away with that in other countries of western Europe.

I will not accept lectures on unemployment from the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding when he says that a national minimum wage would help to create unemployment, a hoary old chestnut that we now regularly hear from Conservative Members. What about other countries in western Europe and the Economic Community that have national minimum wages and are prepared to defend them? He gave the example of France, but there are many reasons for the difficulties experienced with the French economy during the past 11 years or so —[HON. MEMBERS: "The socialist Government."] There are many benefits of a socialist Government. Many other countries, including Germany, have a national minimum wage.

Perhaps the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding would like to comment on the German economy, which has basic minima built into its payment structures. Why is it that only the Conservative Government have felt it necessary to object to the proposals of the social charter in terms of the protections offered? The Conservative Government are swimming against the tide, and the hon. Gentleman's remarks show that he is doing so as well.

I resent comments on unemployment when we should have given greater thought in this debate to unemployment. After all, the debate was opened by the Secretary of State for Employment and recent figures have shown the current state of unemployment. In my constituency, unemployment is running at 19 per cent. In the bad areas of inner-city Glasgow it is 26·8 per cent. In the Bridgeton-Dalmarnock area, which contains many young people, it is over 25 per cent. One of the Secretary of State's other responsibilities is training. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) talked about cuts for TECs in England and Wales. Their equivalent, the local enterprise companies in Scotland, have also suffered cuts—£110 million and more has been cut from training budgets at a time when young people in particular desperately need more training. That aspect of industrial relations and employment has not been given adequate consideration today.

Unemployment in my constituency is even higher than the figures that I mentioned among those under 24—especially among 16 and 17-year-olds, whom the Government claim are guaranteed places on youth training schemes. That guarantee is a sham and a farce. It is well known that many young people who do not choose to stay on at school and who cannot find regular employment are unable to get the YTS place that the Government claim is available for everyone.

Perhaps that is not surprising when we consider that the real amount spent by the Government on youth training since 1988 has fallen by more than 50 per cent. That is scandalous. It also goes some way towards explaining the unemployment figures.

I want to refer to one statistic pubished in "Strathclyde Economic Trends", a regular report published by Strathclyde regional council. It describes unemployment levels in Strathclyde region, which covers a large proportion of Scotland. The report states:

"Thirty-five per cent. of Strathclyde's unemployed had been unemployed for over a year—19 per cent. had been unemployed for more than two years. In October 1991, 8·4 per cent. of the unemployed in Strathclyde had been unemployed for more than five years. Strathclyde held 9·6 per cent. of the British total of those unemployed for over five years compared to its overall unemployment share of 5·2 per cent.".

That is the scale of the problem, and the Minister chose largely to ignore it in his speech.

As unemployment continues inexorably to rise towards 3 million—it has now risen for 23 consecutive months—what does the Secretary of State propose to do? Does he come to the House and talk about job creation or training opportunities or helping those faced with the appalling prospect of being unable to find work? No, he ignores all those aspects; he ignores the fact that each unemployed man or woman costs the Treasury a sum calculated at about £8,000 per man or woman a year in benefits and lost tax revenue. That is a criminal waste of talent and public money.

Instead of dealing with these issues, the right hon. and learned Gentleman chooses to introduce two new attempts at shackling the trade unions. Of course, the public recognise that they are no more than a smokescreen intended to divert their attention, and that of the media, from the real problems associated with the Minister's major responsibilities. The public see through that; at the same time, like Opposition Members, they despair at the Secretary of State's sense of priorities.

In the past four months the Government have introduced their latest plans on top of five major Acts aimed principally at restricting the freedoms of trade unions and their members. The imaginatively entitled documents "Industrial Relations in the 1990s" and "People, Jobs and Opportunity" follow the step-by-step approach begun by Lord Prior when he was Secretary of State for Employment with the Employment Act 1980 and followed by the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) with the Employment Act 1982 and the Trade Union Act 1984. They in turn were followed by the Employment Act of 1988, introduced by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), and, most recently, by the present Secretary of State's Employment Act 1990. Five Acts from four Secretaries of State; neither the Acts nor the men who promoted them have had any interest in developing the sort of industrial relations practices which have helped to build successful economies from Stockholm to Bonn.

The last 13 years have told their own story. It is surely impossible to formulate a meaningful response to economic slumps—by building a commitment to full employment, to skills training and to equal opportunities and by promoting better standards of health and safety—without reflecting the role that the independent unions play in promoting those values. The Government's Acts represent a systematic attempt to erase all forms of trade union organisation and to erode the commitment of their members to all forms of solidarity and collective action. The very word "collectivity" has been, in the Government's view, a bad one.

The Minister has claimed time and again that the trade union movement is living in the past. I suggest that he and the Government examine their own record, particularly with reference to the employment legislation put on the statute book in the past decade and more. Workers in dispute being sacked, as legitimised by the 1982 Act, is a return to lock-out bosses, blacklists and the degradation of casual labour which flourished during the depression. Union finances are regulated by ballot under the 1984 Act, but employers can donate their resources at will. That is not redressing the balance between employers and trade unions: it is shifting the balance irretrievably in favour of employers on a scale not seen since the 1930s.

Ballots of members—this is the most amazing feature of all—in pursuit of industrial action can be casually set aside by individuals choosing to opt out of the decisions of the majority. That can be done under the terms of the 1988 Act. The unions face penalties for seeking to uphold the right of their majorities—the people who have voted in favour of industrial action. That is surely a retrograde step; it neither builds good industrial relations nor respects basic democratic decisions.

If these are not attempts to roll back the carpet of industrial history, I do not know what are. It is the Government who are living in the past by turning the clock back to the years when employers could act at will.

All this is the measure of the chasm that exists between Britain and our major competitors. While we move down the path of ever more repressive legislation, the rest of Europe embraces mature work relationships between employers and employees. The social chapter is yet another example of the Government's paranoia about workers' rights. The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding spoke of the social charter—what are the Government afraid of? Why do they feel that they must swim against the tide when all other 11 members of the European Community believe that they can adopt the social charter with confidence? Those countries do not seem to think that it will wreck their economies, so why should it wreck ours? The social charter includes many items that will benefit the workers of this country, but it will take a Labour Government coming to power before we can illustrate that.

Why have the Government denigrated the role of the unions in society at every turn? Unions continue to exercise many vital functions and they continue to attract about 8 million members—a considerable number. Although that number has fallen considerably in the past 10 years, it stands up well by comparison with trade union membership in many other European countries. Unions continue to offer advice to members on a wide range of issues. As a full-time official of the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs—now Manufacturing Science and Finance—I was privileged to become involved in collective bargaining on terms and conditions, trading claims, disciplinary hearings and in representation at industrial tribunals.

Above all, trade unions have a moderating influence on employers who want to adopt the manner and the management techniques of the Victorian mill owner. Trade unions play a vital role in industrial relations, which the Government claim the debate is about. They also play a part in influencing events in this Parliament and in the European Parliament. I can quote two good examples of that from my trade union. In the 1960s, employees in the engineering and shipbuilding industries who joined a superannuation fund, which was known as the foreman and staff mutual benefit society, and subsequently joined a trade union, had to resign from the society. They were denied the right to superannuation.

In those days, employers paid 10 shillings a week and employees paid five shillings, but those contributions were lost to employees who chose to join a trade union. A private Member's Bill outlawed that practice and significantly changed the way in which generations of workers consider superannuation and pensions—which, when all is said and done, are simply deferred earnings.

There is another example which occurred as recently as last week, when the Offshore Safety (Prevention Against Victimisation) Bill was introduced as a private Member's Bill in the other place. It was promoted by Baroness Turner of Camden, a former assistant general secretary of the ASTMS. She did so because of the many people in the oil industry who belong to her trade union. No doubt the Under-Secretary will confirm that not only was the Bill well received by Viscount Ullswater and the Government but Government amendments have strengthened it. That is a clear example of the importance of trade union influence on democracy through Parliament.

The Minister should recognise the long and honourable traditions of trade unions and their historic links with the Labour party. We are not afraid of those links, because the trade unions founded the Labour party and the links, which remain to this day, albeit in a changed form, are relevant to modern times. Good industrial relations—if that is what the Government intend to promote—require strong trade unions. If the Minister denies that, he is admitting his lack of concern about promoting or even maintaining good industrial relations. Of course, such relations apply to both sides of industry. That is why employers' organisations such as the Engineering Employers Federation, the CBI and chambers of commerce oppose the two latest batches of tawdry proposals about which I have spoken. They are unwanted, unnecessary and vindictive.

Happily, the Minister and his colleagues will not have the opportunity to place the legislation on the statute book. The people of this country will see to that on 9 April.

9.1 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak after the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson). The hon. Gentleman spoke moderately and well, but he is still looking back, seeking achievements that belong to the past. I do not say that in a partisan way and I hope that my speech will be academic rather than party political.

I am no great industrial or political historian. Harold Wilson, now Lord Wilson of Rievaulx, and his

[Mr. Ian Bruce]

Employment Secretary, Barbara Castle, now Baroness Castle of Blackburn, tried to wrestle with the problems of industrial relations. The whole of industry and even trade unions appreciated the dangers of the terrible breakdowns in relationships. My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) also recognised the problem and it could be forcefully argued that his Government fell because they did not get to grips with industrial relationships.

Harold Wilson and James Callaghan would have loved to have few strikes, because keeping down the number of strikes is not just good for employers; the people who suffer most from strikes are employees. One only has to look at the year-long miners' strike and the suffering that that caused to appreciate that fact. Whatever our political party, it is in everyone's interest to have good industrial relations.

The Labour publication "Opportunity Britain" looks back and seeks to find what can be gained from the labour laws that have been passed by a "terrible" Conservative Government. In many ways, the Government's greatest achievement is industrial peace. Labour still advocates 100 per cent. trade union membership. If Labour did not want to sign the social charter it would not be so mealy-mouthed and could say that it supports the closed shop.

The Opposition look back to the taking of sympathy action, which is the most damaging and ridiculous response of all. It means, that employees go to damage an employer who is not in dispute with those who take that action. The taking of action spreads. Instead of local managers and employees getting together to solve their problems, the problems spread and there may be an attempt to involve the Government. Picketing and secondary picketing are backward-looking. We have the industrial court and the wish to stop the sequestration of assets. It may seem harsh that trade unions should suffer sequestration, but the possibility that they might do so has meant that they have sought ways of negotiating through problems instead of putting their assets at risk.

The effect of the Government's legislative changes have been excellent for everyone involved. It is good that the Labour party, despite its protestations, is now advocating free and fair balloting. Obviously I welcome that. However, when people feel that they wish to join a trade union, we must ensure that they are able to do so. I feel strongly that an individual should have the right to return to work even if he is the minority of one and 1,000 others have voted to go on strike. His contract is between him and his employer, and if he does not wish to break it no one should force him to do so.

Mr. Watson: Surely that is a negation of democracy. If a person takes part in a ballot and comes out on the losing side, it should be understood that the essence of democracy is that one abides by the decision of the majority. Someone should not be able to say, "Because it has gone the other way, I shall not recognise the decision. I shall opt out and go my own way." That makes nonsense of democracy.

Mr. Bruce: Surely it is right that the individual should be allowed to continue with his contract if he wishes to do so. If someone found himself in that position, it might be right to resign from his trade union at that stage, or even before the ballot. He must be able to decide, however, whether he will break his contract with his employer. It is extremely important that contract law is understood by all parties.

The Labour party is wrong-headed in thinking that the social chapter will provide it with something that it does not have already. In fact, it would take away from a Labour Government, a Liberal Government or a continuing Conservative Government the ability to decide what is right for United Kingdom industrial relations. We see throughout the European Community the different ways in which people organise themselves. That applies to trade unions, industrial relations generally and codified employment legislation. That shows that it is much better for individual countries to go their own way.

I am not saying that social chapter decisions should not cover the United Kingdom. They must, however, be United Kingdom decisions. In other words, we must take the decisions for ourselves.

Perhaps the most important consideration is the wrong-headedness of continuing to say that there should be a

"partnership between management, unions and individual employees."

I quote from Labour's "Opportunity Britain", but I hear that said by hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber.

I believe that the correct partnership is between employers and employees. If they need others to become involved in that relationship, they should be able to bring them in. It is wrong to say that trade unions must be a part of any partnership that involves a working relationship between an employer and his employees. I am not suggesting that trade unions should not be available.

There are those who say, "Fewer people are joining trade unions and we should panic." I disagree. I think that we should rejoice—not because people are being stopped from joining a trade union but because industrial relations are so good that individuals are saying, "I no longer need somebody to negotiate with my employer on my behalf because I believe that I am getting the best deal."

As a management consultant, I was often asked by companies, "How do we stop a trade union from coming into the firm?" I would reply, "It is simple: you must provide for your employees the benefits that they would expect from a trade union." That means talking constantly to employees, negotiating with them and ensuring the existence of a two-way flow of information. I am convinced that the past problems of many British companies were wholly caused by the arrangement whereby the management sat in an office while the employees were down on the shop floor, and, to talk to the employees, the management had to go through the union. That arrangement was nonsense.

According to my definition of management, everyone in a company—from the chairman to the floor sweeper—must be involved in some aspect of managing that company. When a problem needs to be sorted out between an employer and his immediate superior, it is absurd that the employee should have to consult his shop steward first. Shop stewards—and trade unions—do an excellent job when there is a problem, or a breakdown in industrial relations; but we should welcome the present good state of industrial relations. We should set up the mechanisms to deal with failure, but we should be pleased that employees do not constantly feel the need to seek union

representatives to look after their interests, and that employers must constantly ensure that employees are properly consulted—that they must talk to them, listen to them and try to secure the best possible deal for individual employees.

9.11 pm

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): I disagreed with most of what the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) said, but I agreed with one of his comments. He said that it would be a good thing for hon. Members to declare some of their interests before making their speeches. It seems to me that it is often the Opposition Members who declare their interests; I for one would appreciate it if Conservative Members declared theirs, and told the House who they work for.

Let me place on record my industrial background. I used to be a planning engineer: I worked with turbines, gas engines and machine tools, and in other parts of the engineering industry, and I am proud of that. I mention my background because the Secretary of State intimated earlier—sneering and wagging his finger—that no Opposition Member had ever got his fingers dirty. In my experience, it is often Opposition Members who understand the workers, because they have had to earn a living and therefore appreciate some of the problems.

In my view, today's debate is a complete sham. It is just a little window-dressing job before a general election. I think that Conservative Members are reading the situation wrongly; I do not believe that they will get any mileage out of the debate. The Government have entitled it "Industrial Relations". What does "Industrial Relations" mean? The present Government do not believe in relationships, and, as a consequence, there are no industrial relations. I, with my industrial background, see industrial relations as a two-way process—the process of getting a relationship going. Because the Government have never experienced that process, they are going down and down in the esteem of the people.

Let me remind Ministers that there are 8 million trade union members in this country, and possibly 8 million families attached to them. Those people are highly representative. The Conservatives seem to hate workers and trade unionists, but, as I have said, I believe that they are reading the situation wrongly—especially in view of the approaching general election.

Mr. Ian Bruce *rose*——

Mr. Eastham: I should like to give way, but I will not.

Mr. Bruce: He cannot take it.

Mr. Eastham: All right; I will give way.

Mr. Bruce: I take exception to what the hon. Gentleman has been saying. I worked on the shop floor for five years as I was working my way through college. I was a student apprentice in engineering. I was a work study officer for five years, and I had charge of negotiating with trade unions. No trade union ever called a strike after those negotiations. They felt that I was a professional manager. Then I managed a factory for five years. I take exception to the hon. Gentleman's suggestions about Conservative Members, who were generally selected by their constituents because of their success in business or whatever they had done in their lives.

Mr. Eastham: I am sorry that I gave way. The hon. Gentleman was boasting about being one of the true workers. He is probably one of only about 10 of the 350-odd Conservative Members. I do not think that he did any good in trying to advocate his great sympathy and support for workers.

In debates on industry, reference is often made to other countries such as Germany. The Government often refer to the better relations between management and workers in Germany. It is interesting to note that the trade union structure which Germany has enjoyed for the past 40-odd years was introduced by the post-war British Labour Government. Therefore, it could not have been so bad.

Tory Members always want to go back to the last century, like Luddites. They think that those were the good old days when the way to manage men was to "hire 'em and fire 'em". We are the only country that seems to want to go along those lines.

Let us get back to basics. Why were trade unions formed? The answer is simple. It was not that trade unions were suddenly an act of God. Trade unions were forced on workers because of greedy, brutal employers who did not care about the workers. During the last century the workers were compelled to form themselves into trade unions because of the brutality and complete indifference of some bosses.

During the past 12 to 13 years, the Tories have been busy trying to turn the clock back by reducing the rights of workers. There are no rights to holidays for part-time workers. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) is tittering; he thinks that it is all a big joke. Let his name go on record so that his constituents may see how he is sneering about the rights of part-time workers.

As to minimum pay, time after time we have listened to Tory Members saying that employers could not afford to pay a minimum wage. If it was left to some employers, they would not be satisfied if they had to pay 50p an hour, never mind £3·40. Some of the most progressive, successful countries pay a minimum wage. The people of Germany, who have produced the great miracle, believe in a minimum wage, and they put their belief into practice.

Some nights ago, I was involved in a meeting in this building with members of the Equal Opportunities Commission. It could hardly be said that those people are political, yet they told us forthrightly that they believed very strongly in a minimum wage and in Labour's proposals to that end. I had said to them that, whether or not they were supposed to be non-political, they might for once say that this proposal was good. Member after Member and Minister after Minister has said how damaging and destructive a minimum wage would be to the country. Nobody else believes that. I do not mind if Members go to the polls saying that they are opposed to the idea of a minimum wage. Whatever they say, the vast majority of people do believe in the idea.

It is dawning on people that, when poor employers pay starvation wages, the employees have to claim a subsidy from the taxpayer. What kind of madness is it that ordinary families should be expected, by way of their taxes, to subsidise the starvation wages that some employers pay? Perhaps the Minister in his reply will again take up the question of the minimum wage. I hope so, as every mention of it brings joy to my heart. On this matter, we shall receive massive support at the polls.

[Mr. Eastham]

The Government constantly refer to their desire to sue workers. They never talk about suing bad employers. There has been reference to the damaging effects and unfairness of secondary picketing. What about companies, like Hanson and lots of others, that go in for asset-stripping? Employees who are doing a very successful job may suddenly find that their place of work is to close down. It is not a question of performance or of productivity.

Is that not a matter that Conservative Members ought to be talking about? Let them stop being one-sided by talking about how damaging workers' action is to other companies. Scores of companies in this country have been damaged by takeovers and asset-stripping. Hanson is only one of the many cases. The big competition between Hanson and ICI was rather interesting. This was one occasion on which the consequences of Hanson's actions were pointed out by management.

In some quarters, it is implied that workers do not co-operate with management. That is an absolute myth. Reference has been made to Japanese successes. What is the reason for the record of the Japanese? Obviously, it is a question of management. The production rate of one company rose by 70 per cent. with a static work force. The only changes were in management. That being the case, surely whatever was wrong was to be found in the management structure.

Let me give another example of co-operation, this time in my area. I met the managing director of Ferranti, Moston. The company is going through a very difficult patch but says openly that it has had every co-operation from the workers, who have done their level best to make it a success. Why is this firm in great difficulties? The reason is that big business cheated and robbed the company of hundreds of millions of pounds, and, as a result, Ferranti is tottering and jobs are being lost. However, we never seem to talk about it. Let us be realistic. Why cannot the Government be even-handed? Why cannot they see for once that management should be reorganised?

Unfortunately, time has run out for me; it is a good job for the Government, because I was all ready for another hour.

9.25 pm

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): I intend to be brief, and I shall need to be. I had not intended to speak, but having listened to some of the contributions from Conservative hon. Members and having seen their lack of understanding of the problems and the reality faced by people outside, I felt that I had to make a contribution on behalf of my constituents.

Not only do some Conservative Members not understand the problems: they do not even care. That is perhaps best exemplified by the Prime Minister's comment which was referred to during Prime Minister's Question Time today—to the effect that "if it isn't hurting, it isn't working." What my constituents want to know is why it is hurting but still not working. In my constituency, 76 per cent. of manufacturing jobs were lost between 1979 and 1989, and a further 3,600 have gone since.

I remember, when I started work in the mid-1970s, making a bus journey through what, as it turns out, is now my constituency. The journey took me from Johnstone, where there was a lot of engineering employment, through Elderslie, where there were carpet factories and adjacent to the Talbot car factory in Linley, through to the thread mills of Paisley. None of those companies is still there; it is ironic that, by the end of this year, not a single stitch of thread will be made in Paisley if Coats Viyella is allowed to carry out its closure threat.

The position is best exemplified by a story told to me during the by-election in Paisley, South in November 1990. It was told to me by a newsagent in Johnstone called George Barr. He said that, on the morning that the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) became Prime Minister, he was in his shop when he heard a thud. He ran outside and found that a young boy who had been going to work had been knocked down trying to cross the road to catch the works bus. He could not cross the road because it was full of buses and cars taking people to work. The day that he told me that story in 1990—ironically, the day that the right hon. Lady fell from power—two boys were playing football across the same road. That is what the decade has done to the area.

In the minute or so left, I want to deal with the European social charter. Last week, I watched a business programme in which a business commentator clearly expressed the concerns of many managers in British industry. They are worried that, because this is the only country which has opted out of the charter, if there are to be closures in multinational companies that employ people throughout Europe, the easiest places to close will be those in the United Kingdom.

In the past few years, we have seen dereliction, decay and despondency all over the country caused by the Government's economic policies. Fortunately for the people of my consituency and for the people of Scotland and Great Britain, those days are coming to an end; it will not be many weeks before we return to policies of common sense and common decency for the common good.

9.29 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): I establish again for the record that I am a sponsored Member of Parliament. That will save the Minister saying it. I also read into the record the fact that among Conservative Members present, there is a grand total of seven directorships, three consultancies and one chairmanship of a pension trust. I assume that that post is remunerated, but I am not sure.

The hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) mentioned Maxwell. I begin on a theme that is important to Conservative Members. Their allegation throughout the debate is that there is something basically wrong with the trade union movement. That is why the Secretary of State, on this day of all days, introduces a debate on industrial relations.

We know that the Secretary of State is hostile to trade unions, but we also know that his hostility is wholly synthetic and cynical. When he was first appointed to the Cabinet in January 1990, the BBC Radio 4 "Today" programme reported:

> "Mr. Howard said that when the Employment Bill now before Parliament, became law, the desired balance of industrial law would have been achieved. 'When these reforms are in place we shall have the right framework with which to move into the 90s'."

He also said that he planned to make improved training his main priority.

We know what the reality has been since that time. The Secretary of State has been bloodied in Cabinet every time when it comes to money for training. I am glad that the Secretary of State arrives post haste to hear that pronouncement. For his benefit, I repeat that, although when he first came to office, he declared that the industrial relations-bashing exercise was at an end and that training was the priority, he has lost every battle in Cabinet for money for training.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's training programme is already a disaster. There are £110 million of cuts for next year. I assume that that represents one more of his demands to the Cabinet for money having been ripped up and tossed aside to be cast on the fires of a broken yesterday. The Secretary of State is now fighting for his survival.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's speech today interestingly made no reference to his own White Paper or to his own Green Paper. He had nothing to say about the dramatic events which Conservative Members have tried to persuade the House are the next step in the step-by-step reform of industrial relations.

Not only the Opposition, but the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Personnel Management and the Association of British Chambers of Commerce condemn the Green Papers as irrelevant and hardly worth the exercise involved.

We know that today, unemployment is once again at relatively record heights. Under the stewardship of the Prime Minister, 800,000-plus people have been thrown on to the dole queues. We know that those 800,000 people represent not only human tragedy, but a tremendous cost to the British economy. Those people represent billions of pounds of waste in resources to the economy. When we compare the days lost by those whom the Secretary of State for Employment—as my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) called him, the Secretary of State for unemployment—has thrown onto the dole with the days lost through industrial stoppages, we realise that it is little wonder that the Secretary of State wants to talk about industrial relations. He could not come to the House to debate either the human tragedy or the economic cost of the unemployment that he and his Government have created.

The Secretary of State briefly mentioned health and safety after an intervention in his speech by my hon. Friend for Neath (Mr. Hain). I noticed that he was not prepared to give way to continue that debate so that we might have been able to discuss the 30 million days lost in British industry through accidents and industrial illness. We know that most of that is preventable and that, under this Government and after two years of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's stewardship, there has been no effort to prevent it. We know that Mr. Rimington, the chief executive of the Health and Safety Executive, has placed it on record in this year's annual report that he is only now recovering from the understaffing of previous years while the Secretary of State was a member of the Government. That is the reality.

Mr. Howard: Is the hon. Gentleman not aware that the European Commission's mapping project demonstrated conclusively that health and safety at work in this country was second to none and better than most?

Mr. Lloyd: Let me place it on the record that the Opposition cannot share that sanguine and indifferent view of the plight of real people, when the tide of deaths and serious injuries in industry is rising and the failure to resource adequately and prioritise health and safety puts ordinary people at risk.

In Committee today, we debated the tragedy of those who died in the Piper Alpha tragedy. We could also have debated the tragedies of the hundreds and thousands of families whose lives are blighted when one of their loved ones dies or is injured in the workplace. Today there was a memorial service at Westminster cathedral. Unfortunately, because I was engaged in the Offshore Safety Bill Standing Committee, I could not attend it. It simply bore witness to the tragic waste of the 100 people who died in the construction industry last year. That was a tragedy which could have been prevented if we had had a Government who were prepared to prioritise health and safety. That is industrial relations.

It is also industrial relations when we recognise that in Britain today we are seeing the rise of the part-time worker, the home worker and the low-paid, and that 11 million people now live in families where poverty is a major condition of their life. Those are the people whose plight lies firmly at the doorstep of the Government. They are the people whom the Government have refused to help.

We hear all sorts of pious nonsense about step-by-step reform of industrial relations. That does not detract from the fact that many of our fellow citizens have been plunged into poverty by the direct actions of the Government and the incompetence of the Prime Minister when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, the present Chancellor and, of course, the Secretary of State for Employment.

The Government have not introduced programmes to do anything about unemployment. We were told today that the employment action programme managed to absorb only 10,000 of the 300,000 people thrown out of work over its period of existence. When my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) made that point, the Secretary of State intervened from a sedentary position to say that my hon. Friend should be careful because he might hear something about it.

I listened carefully to all the speeches that were made subsequently. I will listen carefully to the Minister who replies. I hope that we shall hear some dramatic news that the Secretary of State has a plan of action for the 300,000 made unemployed in that period or for the 230,000 who were unemployed before the extra 300,000 people lost their jobs. The public want to know about them.

Conservative Members have waxed eloquent about their tremendous concern about unemployment, even though they supported the Government on mass unemployment.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): They do not care.

Mr. Lloyd: As my hon. Friend says, they do not care. Of course, we know that. But we also know that an election is approaching and that, for purely political purposes, it is necessary for them to place on record how much they care. They thought, as the Secretary of State did, that they saw a winner in Labour's promises of a national minimum wage.

[Mr. Lloyd]

Conservative Members express anxiety about a national minimum wage creating unemployment. It was refreshing to hear the Under-Secretary of State—I must say, in the Secretary of State's absence—own up to something that the Secretary of State has never said. He disowned the Secretary of State's eccentric claims about the number of jobs that would be destroyed. In his new mood and perhaps moving to the left of the Tory party, positioning himself for the Kenneth Clarke takeover in opposition, the Under-Secretary of State is ready to rat on his Secretary of State, and is already scaling down the unemployment consequences of the minimum wage.

Let me tell Conservative Members why the Labour party has absolutely no intention of recoiling from the minimum wage. When rates of pay exist which are so disfiguring to those who have work on them, the only possibility is to introduce a national minimum wage to guarantee that people have some dignity in work.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lloyd: I am sorry, I do not have enough time. The hon. Gentleman made his speech and there is not enough time for me to give way.

People are asked to work as security guards—a responsible position in society, someone responsible for the guarding of public and private property—for 93 hours a week at a princely pay rate of £2 an hour with no overtime. Conservative Members must know that those wages are an outrage in a society such as ours. That outrage comes to the door of the Conservative Members who are prepared to defend such payments.

People are asked to work as clerks for 39 hours a week for as little as £1·52 an hour. I defy any Conservative Member to bring up a family on a 39-hour week at £1·52 an hour. The Secretary of State then offers the taxpayers' money—our money, public money—to prop up the lousy employer. Will the Secretary of State tell me why, when it comes to public spending on the health service, it is the public's money, but when it comes to propping up the lousy employer, the employer who will not pay a decent rate, as far as he is concerned that is fair and reasonable?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman was not aware of the European Commission's mapping project a few moments ago. Apparently he is also unaware of the report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which states clearly that the way to help people in low-paid work is through the benefits system and not by destroying their jobs. Is the hon. Gentleman entirely unaware of that elementary proposition?

Mr. Lloyd: I am delighted that the Secretary of State is a late convert to international action. The Secretary of State, who has been condemned by the International Labour Organisation for being in breach of his treaty obligations, who turned his back on the process of the social charter because he thought that there were political points to be scored from knocking those vague foreigners, is now praying in aid the OECD. I am interested to hear that.

I would be far more convinced if the Secretary of State were to tell the House that he would take cognisance of the European Community's opinion on an equitable wage. The Secretary of State will not accept that that forms a basis. We know that once again Britain is out of step with the rest of Europe, which wants some concept of an equitable wage—a decent wage for all. We want a decent wage for all our people.

Mr. Ian Bruce: How much?

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman may read our policy document where that is made explicit.

Mr. Bruce: How much?

Mr. Lloyd: If the hon. Gentleman cares to read that document he will know what it is. His political paranoia, borne of fear of defeat, will bear fruit. He and the Government will lose and we shall introduce a national minimum wage.

We know that the work force in Britain have the worst working conditions of any in the European Community. We know that we have the worst child care in Europe, and that Britain is the only country with no protection for its workers' hours of work, annual pay, annual holidays or for the working week. Part-time workers are uniquely discriminated against in Britain—an achievement which is unparalleled elsewhere. The Government have decided to persecute the part-time worker.

That is why we shall sign up for the social chapter. That will be one of the first actions of a Labour Government. We shall ensure that we implement—in a way which is in keeping with the needs of the British economy—directives such as those on working hours, and atypical workers. We shall make them suitable for the sort of economy that we have in this country.

We shall not use the stand-offish nonsensical approach that has made us the laughing stock of the rest of Europe. If Britain has to adhere to the social chapter—as it will under any Government—under the Government's terms, we shall have to accept someone else's bargain at the expense of the British worker, as we have in the past.

The Secretary of State's employment policies have disfigured our society more generally. My constituency has suffered mass unemployment throughout the Government's time in office. I say that with no pride because it disfigures my constituents and my constituency. I have had problems with crime, with the sale of drugs and there have even been killings in my constituency as a result of mass unemployment. I lay those directly at the door of the Government.

I wish to bring the attention of hon. Members to the headline on the front page of today's *Evening Standard*, "Crime: Blame the Economy—Yard." The article states that Scotland Yard is putting the blame for the crime wave clearly at the door of the Government. It says:

> "Social deprivation can be linked to most areas of crime —and the Government must address the electorate in terms of a solution."

Opposition Members have been saying that for many years. It is time that the Government began to understand it. The tragedy is that, as with every other source of opposition—local government or trade unions—the Government will seek to abolish the Metropolitan police because it dared to raise a voice in anger.

This has been a good debate in at least one aspect. We have seen that nothing divides the parties more sharply than an issue such as this. My hon. Friends have tried to paint a constructive picture of the future. My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield gave a clear vision of Britain with an industrial structure that would provide a future of

conciliation and balance for all our people. The Secretary of State and his hon. Friends want to return to the agenda of the 1970s. I do not know whether this is a parliamentary expression, but the Secretary of State's constant reversion to the policies of the 1970s is a form of political necrophilia, which is almost unknown in other circumstances.

The debate has been important because the public will draw its own conclusions about what divides the parties and, when it comes to the general election, I know how the public will judge the Government.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): I think we have smoked them out now, because the debate has been characterised by a six-hour attempt by those on the Opposition Front Bench to distance themselves from the trade unions. That will not wash. The answer is perfectly simple and the clue behind it all, in common with many other answers, lies in the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans). I recommend that all hon. Members should read it, because I regret that they were not present to hear it.

My hon. Friend referred to the fact that the Labour party, in spite of its attempt to give the opposite impression today, is the creature, and in the pockets, of the trade unions. My hon. Friend gave one quotation to back that argument and I shall give two others. The first comes from the Leader of the Opposition who, only last year, said:

"In every region, in every industry, in every constituency this union"—

the union that sponsors the right hon. Gentleman—

"represents the Labour party. This union is the Labour Party in so many ways."

Mr. Bill Morris, the boss of the union which sponsors not only the Leader of the Opposition but the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), said:

"This union will never part company with the Labour Party, because we are the Labour Party."

Despite the best efforts of Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen, that is the true position. That is what underlines the debate and what has emerged from it.

Those quotes explain why the unions still have a block vote in the selection of Labour parliamentary candidates; 150 Labour Members—more than half the parliamentary party—are sponsored by trade unions. Some of them had the decency to admit that fact in the debate, but not those on the Opposition Front Bench. I remind the House, if I need to do so, that the unions still control the vast majority of the votes at the Labour party conference. Indeed, they cast 5 million votes at the conference, equivalent to nearly 90 per cent. of the total eligible votes. That sets the tone for the debate.

I need not mention the fact that the unions also contribute the bulk of the Labour party's funds. In 1990, they gave almost £4·2 million to it—two thirds of the party's total income. That also gives the lie to the relationship between the trade unions and the Labour party.

I have given the background to this debate, a background which has had two important results. First, Opposition Members tried to skid over the fact that the Labour party has systematically opposed every trade union reform that the Government have introduced, despite the fact that it is now acknowledged by everyone in the real world, the business world and the international community—if not by the Labour party—that the steady reform of industrial relations has been one of the greatest steps forward and has formed the basis of the revival of our competitive position. It has also attracted inward investment to this country. That is beyond dispute. Despite all that, the Opposition have hardly supported those reforms.

In 1990, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) was Opposition Front-Bench spokesman on employment and he was asked about the attitude of a future Labour Government to our legislation. He said:

"It's going to repeal all of it, there's no little bits you can keep of it. There's nothing you can keep of this legislation . . . It all has to go."

That was said by the hon. Gentleman in a moment of honesty. He now probably deeply regrets saying it.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) described the measure which for the first time gave union members the right to a strike ballot and to elect their leaders by vote, as "an irrelevant effrontery" and went on to describe the statutory requirement for ballots as "intellectually disreputable"—that said by a Member who is now regarded as one of the leading lights, if not a future leader, of the Labour party.

What has happened between the time those words were spoken and now that has made the Labour Members so reticent on the subject? What explains the fact that, having been so adamantly opposed to our careful, stage-by-stage reforms, they are now utterly silent on the subject? We cannot get from Labour Members, including the occupants of the Labour Front Bench, their true attitude on these issues. Will they repeal any of our measures? They will not say. They are suddenly coy and silent. Do they stand by them? They will not say, not even during this debate, in which we have given them an opportunity to set out their views. We are as much in the dark now about what the Labour party would do as we were at 4 o'clock this afternoon.

That is bad enough, but let us look further—this develops directly from the incestuous relationship between the trade unions and the Labour party—for having seen that Labour Members have nothing to say about the excellent reforms that we put in place, we must remind ourselves of their record. My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield said, "Labour never condemns strikes," although the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) said, rather plaintively, "No one likes strikes." Why, then, did Labour Members not condemn any of the major strikes that occurred in the 1980s? They did not condemn the miners' strike, the seamen's strike or the dockers' strike. Worse still, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), a Labour Front-Bench spokesman, said during the railway dispute in 1989 that the National Union of Railwaymen was

"in a position to win the dispute and deserved to win it."

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East backed the miners from the start of their dispute, saying, "I give my fullest support to the struggle."

Mr. Marlow: I suggest to my hon. Friend that the occupants of the Labour Front Bench did not criticise any of those strikes because the Labour party is a wholly owned subsidiary of the people who organised and prosecuted the strikes, the people who sought to benefit from them.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend must be right. How could strikes that were so damaging to the public go uncondemned by Labour Members if it were not for the fact that the Labour party is totally in hock to the very unions that created those strikes? That can be the only explanation.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Forth: I will not give way further. We deliberately restricted the time available for the final speeches so that more hon. Members could speak.

There is a remarkable coincidence between the policy wish list of the trade unions and what then turns up as Labour party policy. The National Union of Mineworkers wanted the condemnation of nuclear policy and a restriction on coal imports. That turned up next as Labour party policy. The Confederation of Health Service Employees, the union which dominates the NHS, called on a Labour Government to abolish compulsory competitive tendering. That pops up as official Labour party policy. But the real giveaway—Labour Members have been prepared to admit to it—occurred when the conference of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers reaffirmed its support for a statutory minimum wage. The next thing we know is that a statutory minimum wage crops up as a main plank of the policy of the Labour party.

It is worth spending a moment considering the statutory minimum wage because now, at long last—after much prevarication and shilly-shallying—Labour Members have decided that they are stuck with it as a policy and must make the best of it. They are now suggesting—how they are managing to do it mystifies me—that, by waving a wand and saying that by statute everybody will get paid a certain minimum amount, suddenly everybody who now gets less than a certain sum will get more, with no further results.

Anyone who has worked in business or had anything to do with business knows that, if employers are forced to pay a minimum amount or more than they now pay, there can be only one result: many people will have to sacrifice their jobs so that those left in work can enjoy that wage. If Labour Members persist in denying that, they are trying to force an enormous con trick on the public. The public and the electorate will not be fooled. If that is the main policy that the Labour party has in that context, they will get a nasty surprise.

In the Labour party's typical way, it is patronising the electorate and the work force by imagining that people will believe that, simply by wishing on the business community a higher level of pay than exists now, jobs will not be sacrificed. The Labour party stands condemned for not caring about the employment of the very people whom they claim to represent. That is the scandal of what Opposition Members have sought to say during this debate.

Labour Members talk about the social action programme, the social charter and the social chapter and ask us why the Prime Minister so stoutly resisted attempts to lure us into a European Community plot to foist on our economy costs borne by many of our partners in the European Community. When Mr. Delors heard what had happened in Maastricht, he accurately predicted that it would make the United Kingdom a magnet and a paradise for inward investment. We know, and even Jacques Delors knows, what Opposition Members do not yet know—if additional costs are foisted on employers of the Community, the only result can be that we shall become less competitive. We do not want that to happen to our industry, which is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister resisted the siren voices—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the Minister does not wish to give way, the hon. Gentleman must resume his seat.

Mr. Forth: That is why the Prime Minister resisted the attempts of the European Community to force this country to burden itself with the same overheads on employment as many of our European partners suffer.

Our attitude is clear. If European Governments wish to go down that route, that is for them to decide. We do not want to stop that happening, but if they want to insist that we burden ourselves with the same overheads, we believe that it is our right to resist that because we care about our competitive position. We want to ensure that this country remains competitive in the future and that it will not be burdened in the same way as other European countries. That is the answer to the challenge raised by so many Opposition Members during this debate about how we were able to resist the blandishments of our European partners in going down the route of the social charter and the social chapter.

This has been an important debate because it has given the House an opportunity to judge the different approaches of the Government and the Opposition. The Government have systematically and carefully reformed industrial relations, to the extent that our strike record is the best for a century, inward investment is at an all-time high and this country attracts more than half the total inward investment in the European Community. Workers in the midlands, the north, south Wales and other areas have benefited from inward investment, and they have the Government to thank for that. Opposition Members would jeopardise that investment and those jobs.

The debate has been characterised by the Government being careful about employment prospects now and in the future. It has also been characterised by Opposition Members taking a cavalier and negative approach to employment, both now and in the future. The Labour party will have to answer to the electorate about its policies, which would destroy jobs. The Government want to protect those jobs, and I ask the House to support the motion.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 218, Noes 317.

Division No. 85] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*	Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Alton, David	Benton, Joseph
Anderson, Donald	Bermingham, Gerald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Bidwell, Sydney
Armstrong, Hilary	Blair, Tony
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Blunkett, David
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Boateng, Paul
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Boyes, Roland
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Bradley, Keith
Barron, Kevin	Bray, Dr Jeremy
Battle, John	Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Beckett, Margaret	Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Bell, Stuart	Caborn, Richard
Bellotti, David	Callaghan, Jim
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*

Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Huw
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher

Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Mariand, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Tim Boswell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 314, Noes 215.

Division No. 86] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa

Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'caster)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Tim Boswell.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Huw
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)

Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House congratulates Her Majesty's Government on its success in reforming industrial relations; recognises the importance of these reforms to the improvement in the underlying strength of the British economy; notes that the number of working days lost last year is provisionally estimated to have been the lowest total since records began in 1891; welcomes the Government's proposals to prevent abuse of union 'check-off' procedures and to give members of the public the right to seek protection of the law against unlawful industrial action in the public services; notes that the main Opposition party has refused to indicate whether it supports or opposes these proposals, despite frequent invitations to do so; recalls that it has opposed every stage of the Government's highly successful industrial reforms and remains committed to reversing them; notes that it would put trade unions in a uniquely privileged legal position, giving them rights they did not have even in the mid-1970s; notes that it would allow the return of secondary action and flying pickets; notes that its other policies, particularly the minimum wage, would encourage industrial unrest; believes that its proposals would wreck the competitiveness of British industry by making it impossible for many British firms to deliver goods and provide services to their customers at the time when they are required; and further believes that its policies would destroy employment opportunities, threaten public services, and cause inward investors to take their investment and jobs elsewhere.

Teachers' Pay and Conditions

10.29 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Michael Fallon): I beg to move,

That the Additional Grant Report (England) 1992-93 (House of Commons Paper No. 264), a copy of which was laid before this House on 17th February, be approved.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On the Order Paper, in connection with this motion, there is the following note:

"The Instrument has not yet been considered by the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments."

In fact, the Select Committee considered the instrument this afternoon and found no basis, within the framework of Standing Orders, to report to the House.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that the whole House is grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who is Chairman of the Committee.

Mr. Fallon: The House is indebted to the hon. Gentleman, not just for his work on the Committee but for the information that he has just provided.

Perhaps I should remind the House of the background to this report. In July last year, the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1991 received the Royal Assent. Under that Act, the Prime Minister is required to appoint a review body to examine and to make recommendations on the statutory conditions of employment of school teachers in England and Wales.

The Government's decision to establish a School Teachers Review Body was widely welcomed, not least by five of the six teacher unions. It was rightly seen as clear evidence of the Government's commitment to raising the status of the teaching profession, and was seen by teachers and parents alike as welcome recognition of the professionalism that is now so evident in our schools. Indeed, only the Labour party and some of the more militant members of the National Union of Teachers opposed the establishment of a review body—a fact which we shall again and again make clear to teachers over the coming weeks.

On 20 September, the Prime Minister appointed Sir Graham Day as chairman of the STRB. On the same day, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State asked the review body to make recommendations on the pay and conditions of teachers for the year beginning 1 April 1992, and to do so by the end of January. He invited it to consider, in particular, whether modifications should be made to the system of selective payments and how the pay of school teachers might be more closely related to their performance.

Hon. Members may recall that the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1991 does not give the Secretary of State any power to constrain the work of the review body. He cannot, for instance, impose a financial constraint within which the review body must operate. But he is empowered under section 1(4) of the Act to give the review body directions

"as to considerations to which they are to have regard".

In his letter of 20 September, my right hon. and learned Friend drew attention to a number of such considerations. One of these was affordability, given the level of education standard spending—ESS—for 1992-93. On 26 November, the Secretary of State formally notified the review body of the level of ESS in 1992-93. This represented an increase of 7·2 per cent. in England and Wales as a whole over the 1991-92 figure. My right hon. Friend's letter and his letter of 20 September are reproduced in the STRB's report.

The review body got into its stride without delay. All interested parties were invited to comment, and many were given the opportunity to present oral evidence. Despite the pressure of time, the review body completed its work before the end of January, and its report was published on 10 February.

We believe that the review body has produced an excellent report. The analysis it contains is extremely helpful, and it makes a number of very constructive suggestions for the future. We particularly welcome the review body's affirmation of the importance of moving towards properly designed performance-related pay arrangements, and its intention to bring forward proposals for possible implementation in 1993-94.

For 1992-93, the review body recommended a 7·5 per cent. increase in the value of the standard scale for classroom teachers, the heads and deputies pay spine and most discretionary allowances. It drew particular attention to the needs of primary teachers and, accordingly, recommended that an extra 26,000 incentive allowances should be awarded in primary schools from next September. It also recommended a two-stage increase in London weighting—6·4 per cent. from 1 July 1991, and a further 5·6 per cent. from 1 April.

These are very substantial increases, but the Government nevertheless propose that the review body's recommendations be implemented in full. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has now invited the employers, the teacher unions and other interested parties to comment on the report and on the proposition that it should be fully implemented. Subject to that consultation, the Secretary of State will publish a new school teachers' pay and conditions document and make an order requiring that teachers be paid at the new rates. This award is a fitting tribute to teachers' dedication and achievements.

The review body's recommendations will in total add 7·8 per cent. to the teachers' pay bill in England and Wales. In order to help local authorities to cover the cost of the award the Government propose, subject to this House's approval tonight, to pay additional grant to authorities in England totalling £56·5 million.

In considering the financial implications for local authorities of the review body's recommendations, the Government took into account that the 1992-93 local authority finance settlements for England and Wales had allowed for local authority spending on education to rise, in the two countries taken together, by 7·2 per cent. between 1991-92 and 1992-93. The 7·2 per cent. growth in education spending which we had allowed for in the RSG settlements represents a substantial rise in real terms—the GDP forecast of inflation for the relevant period is only 4·5 per cent.

In the Government's view, the real-terms growth in education standard spending already built into the RSG settlement gives local education authorities adequate headroom to cover the great bulk of the 7·8 per cent. cost of the award for teachers recommended by the review body. I have already reminded hon. Members that, in November last year, the Government directed the review

[Mr. Fallon]

body, in considering its recommendations, to have regard for affordability, given the level of education standard spending for 1992-93. In its report the review body says: "we have taken careful note of what was said to us about affordability by all the parties and have exercised our judgment in the light of all the evidence".

The review body went on to say, quite rightly, that it was the Government's responsibility to decide whether to accept its recommendations and "how they should be funded".

The Government have accordingly considered carefully the extent to which the review body's recommendations are affordable within the context of the 1992-93 RSG settlement. We have concluded that local authorities should be able to afford to meet the cost of an award which is broadly in line with the overall uplift in education standard spending—7·2 per cent. in England and Wales.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): My hon. Friend is aware of the unhappiness in Shropshire about the methodology used to calculate the standard spending assessment and its effect on the county's budget this year. Does he agree that, where the additional grant is based on a pro rata calculation, it has the effect of compounding the apparent unfairness in the settlement for the county of Shropshire?

Mr. Fallon: My hon. Friend will recall that some weeks ago I met a delegation from Shropshire led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) to hear Shropshire's criticism of the SSA methodology. I have subsequently written to him about that. I shall move on to say that the SSA methodology is reviewed each year in conjunction with the local authority associations, and any points made by Shropshire and other authorities about the various factors involved in the SSA methodology—including the sparsity factor, which I know was of some concern to some of the more rural shires—will be considered in the context of that review.

In coming to their view, the Government took account of pressures on LEA budgets, notably the pressure of higher pupil and student numbers and of the full year cost in 1992-93 of the 1991 teachers award which, as the House will recall, was staged. We have also taken into account the substantial scope that remains among LEAs for efficiency savings. On this basis, we have concluded that the RSG settlement as approved was consistent with an award for teachers representing a 7·2 per cent. addition to the pay bill.

The additional grant which we propose in England under section 85 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 accordingly represents the difference, broadly speaking, between the cost of an award corresponding to the uplift in the overall settlement—7·2 per cent. for England and Wales taken together—and the actual award of 7·8 per cent. The £60 million has been calculated on the basis that the overall teachers' pay bill in 1992-93 in England and Wales before implementation of the review body's recommendations is about £9·8 billion.

On this basis, the difference between an award costing 7·2 per cent. and one costing 7·8 per cent.—that is, 0·6 per cent.—is the equivalent of about £60 million for England and Wales taken together. England's share of this, on a pro rata basis, is £56·5 million and that is the amount of additional grant set out in the draft order that we are debating. Wales's share of £3·5 million is being built into its main RSG settlement which the House approved last week.

I am fully aware that some local authority spokesmen claim that the additional grant we propose falls short of what is needed to cover the full cost of the award. It has been suggested in some quarters that, in aggregate, LEAs will be as much as several hundred million pounds short of what they need. I assure the House that the arithmetic underlying such estimates needs to be taken with a very large pinch of salt. It is based on a presumption that all of the LEAs' existing expenditure—including all spending in excess of the Government's assessment of standard spending—should simply roll forward into 1992-93 completely untouched and that pay and price increases and other new pressures next year will be met entirely with new money simply added on to all existing expenditure.

The 1992-93 RSG settlement allowed for spending on education in England to rise by £1,244 million—7·1 per cent. higher than the total for 1991-92 and a staggering 24·2 per cent. higher than the figure allowed in the 1990-91 RSG settlement. The increase in teachers' pay recommended by the review body and the full-year effect of the 1991 staged award for teachers will cost about £900 million. That still leaves authorities with about £400 million headroom, taking account of our proposed additional grant, to meet cost increases and pressures elsewhere in their budgets. Even with inflation at current levels—and it is likely to fall further over the next year—local authorities should be able to live within this, while continuing to maintain acceptable standards of provision.

The local education authorities can do more. The delegation of budgets to schools and colleges has created real scope to reduce the number of bureaucrats in town halls. The LEAs are spending substantial sums on maintaining surplus school places—at least 1·5 million empty desks in England—at a cost of about £350 million. We have never sought to argue that it was practical for LEAs to take all their surplus places out of use, but if only half the current surplus were removed, it would save LEAs running costs of £175 million a year.

Those are not the only areas in which there is scope for savings. The Audit Commission recently published a report which showed that LEAs could make £20 million a year savings in home-to-school transport simply by running it more efficiently. In further education, there is scope for economies of scale as student numbers rise. In further education colleges in England, there is one lecturer to every 11 students.

That makes better use of resources than in the past. In 1988-89, there was one lecturer for every 10 students. But there is still considerable scope here for tightening up. In other words, many of the additional students who are enrolling in LEA colleges—we are very glad to see them in such numbers—can be accommodated at marginal cost without employing additional lecturers.

The difference between the Government's figures and that of certain local authority spokesmen is to be explained entirely in terms of their sheer unwillingness to contemplate the efficiency savings that must be made to get value for money and to keep public spending within tolerable levels. The Government make no apology for encouraging efficiency savings; it is our duty to do so to protect taxpayers and charge payers from excessive demands.

I reiterate our view that, on a realistic and reasonable assessment of what is affordable, local authorities should be able to cover by far the greater part—7·2 per cent.—of the proposed teachers' award within the main RSG settlement as already approved. The review body's recommendation represents a slightly higher uplift than that allowed for in the RSG settlement and the Government propose to pay additional grant under section 85 to make up the difference. There will therefore be no extra demand on LEAs.

There has been some confusion among authorities about the mechanism by which they will receive this grant and its relationship with charge capping. Under section 90, the grant is paid into authorities' collection funds. That means in shire areas that it will be paid into the collection funds of shire districts. London boroughs and metropolitan districts will under section 98(1) transfer the grant into their general funds. Shire districts will be directed to pay the grant to their local education authorities.

Education authorities will need to include the extra expenditure to be financed by the grant in their budget calculations. However, taking the grant into account means that this extra expenditure will not increase their precepts or demands on the collection fund, which are the amounts on which capping bites. The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) may have a little more to say about that later, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The basis for distributing the additional grant is necessarily described in rather technical terms in the report. In brief, and in general terms, we are proposing to allocate the grant by reference to standard spending assessments which are the basis of distribution of the revenue support grant. SSAs represent the Government's assessment of the appropriate amount of spending by each local authority consistent with the provision of a standard level of service.

We propose to use the schools elements of the standard spending assessment for the distribution of this additional grant. The schools elements are under-fives; primary; secondary ages 11 to 15; and secondary ages 16 plus. These elements take account of the distribution of school pupils between LEAs and allow for authorities' different circumstances, in particular for the higher salary costs of employers in London and the south-east and for extra costs incurred by authorities because of additional educational needs.

The SSA methodology to which my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) referred is the subject of extensive consultation every year with the local authority associations. In our view, it represents the fairest means available for distributing grant for educational purposes to local authorities, but we continue to subject that judgment to annual review and full consultation with the local authority associations.

In conclusion, the Government have not brought forward this proposal for additional grant lightly. We bring it foward only after very careful consideration of affordability. We are satisfied that efficient and well-managed authorities will, with the additional grant that we propose, be able to cover the cost of the award while continuing to provide an education service of high quality and without imposing any additional demands on their charge payers.

The House need not simply take that as my view. I would like to quote a letter written by a chief education officer in the press last week:

"There have been many reports in the local press of the predicted impact of the 7·5 per cent. pay award to teachers on the education budgets of certain local councils. I would like to make it clear the North Yorkshire County Council, unlike quite a number of education authorities it would seem, has included within its contingency budget for 1992-93 sufficient funds to meet the teachers' pay award in full. That pay award will not therefore in North Yorkshire lead to a loss of teachers' jobs; nor will any change need to be made in the programme of educational improvements already planned for the coming year."

That quotation shows that a well-managed authority ought to be able to implement the recommendations of the review body with the additional help that we are providing tonight.

10.48 pm

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): It is interesting to follow the Minister, having heard all his blandishments, which bear no relation to the reality that local authorities, teachers and schools face in the current climate. The School Teachers Review Body acknowledges that it has been able to make the settlement in the knowledge that recruitment and retention is better than it had been of late because of the recession.

The junior Minister has given us a complacent picture of local government spending. It offers the prospect of a pay rise to many teachers, the cost of which will be their own jobs.

The reality is that there are severe problems in many authorities, not merely Labour-controlled authorities. For the Minister to dismiss in that way the many problems that everyone in education is facing is—to put it kindly—complacent beyond words. It shows no commitment to raising educational opportunities and standards. He is saying that, as far as the Government are concerned, spending on education in the state sector must be pushed down for ever and a day at whatever cost, even if they are prepared to meet rising costs in the independent sector.

Mr. Fallon: The money is increasing, you silly woman.

Mrs. Armstrong: I shall not rise to the inevitable sexism which comes from the Government Front Bench.

The Secretary of State knows that overall spending on education will not meet the rise in teachers' pay or the rise that schools and authorities know is necessary to meet the other demands which his Department has put upon them, and to meet rolls which are rising because of the increase in the birth rate and because authorities are trying to encourage many more young people to stay on in full-time education after 16. We are supposed to be in favour of that, yet authorities are being penalised for encouraging more young people to stay on in education after 16. They also seem to be being penalised because the birth rate is rising, and I do not know that local authorities have much influence on that.

The junior Minister tried to tell us that all efficient authorities could manage. That would be true if they were facing different circumstances. He is saying that authorities such as Warwickshire, Shropshire and Gloucestershire, which know that they will have enormous difficulties in meeting the pay rise, have been profligate and have not considered the spending needs of their charge payers.

[Mrs. Armstrong]

Some authorities have been telling us that they are being penalised because they have been low spenders, because the Government have calculated standard spending assessments in a way which penalises them. I am not sure that anyone really understands the calculation of SSAs. I led two delegations on the subject to Ministers. There was much agreement that no one around the table really understood it.

When my father was in the Department of the Environment, he used to say that only three people in the Department understood the way in which rate support grant was settled, and none of them agreed about it. There might be a few more people who think that they understand it now, but they probably all disagree with each other. The people who are trying to administer the enormously complex arrangements that the Government have set in train are certainly finding that they do not understand much of it either.

It is clear that the STRB had great difficulty in understanding the complexities in teachers' pay. One of its clearest instructions to the Government is that they have to simplify and clarify the structure of teachers' pay, and that they have to tell governing bodies what they can do.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Just to show that the hon. Lady, at least, understands how SSAs are calculated, will she tell the House how many criteria are used in their assessment?

Ms. Armstrong: I am here in my capacity as a shadow Education Minister—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Allason: Well, educate us.

Ms. Armstrong: I have studied the complexities behind that calculation. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman knows the answer. He may know how many criteria are used, but that does not convince me that he understands what those numbers mean and can explain them.

Mr. Allason *rose*——

Ms. Armstrong: I shall not give way, because we are discussing an issue that is much more serious than the hon. Gentleman's question. The hon. Gentleman cannot convince me that he understands, especially as the civil servants and the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities were unable to persuade me that they did.

Some local authorities led delegations to the Minister for Local Government and the Inner Cities to ascertain what they should allow in their budgets for the teachers pay increase. He said that they should allow no more than 5 per cent. Perhaps that Minister and the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science should have conferred about what a sensible authority should provide for that expenditure, because the Under-Secretary has given us different information.

Once again, local authorities are expected to deal with the fudge that the Government have made of that spending. It is clear from what the Under-Secretary said that the election is pending. It is clear that the incoming Government will have to pick up some enormous bills because of the Government's incompetence.

Perhaps local authorities will be reassured by what the Under-Secretary said to his local newspaper at the weekend.

> "I have never seen a cut in education in spending."

I wonder whether he would be happy to repeat that in Warwickshire, Gloucestershire and Shropshire. He went on:

> "Every year we get scare stories before the budgets are set, yet each year there is more money."

Mr. Fallon: That is true.

Ms. Armstrong: The hon. Gentleman should speak to the teachers. They believe that spending on education has been reduced.

The report of the pay review body states that the conditions in which teachers work and children learn are important. It says that the ability to provide the right environment is almost as important as pay. The number of available books and the state of the buildings in which children and teachers operate effect the morale of teachers and the recruitment and retention of staff. No one who visits schools regularly can be satisfied with the conditions in which much of state education is provided.

The pay review body also drew attention to the ability of primary school teachers to have non-contact time. It recognises that that serious issue has not been addressed adequately. It believes that such non-contact time is of crucial importance if those teachers are to fulfil their responsibilities to children properly under the national curriculum.

The review body also drew attention to the wider issues that must be considered, such as teacher shortages in particular subjects and localities. The review body said that the problems had eased during the year, although they remained serious in some subjects in some localities. It went on:

> "It seems likely, however, that this is largely attributable to current labour market conditions and that some teacher supply problems will return when the economy moves out of recession."

In other words, we are not overcoming the problem of teacher recruitment and retention.

The Secretary of State's press notice accompanying the review body's report made grander claims than the report. For example, the right hon. Gentleman's view of the average teacher is of a person who works in London, who receives incentive allowances, who probably receives some form of discretionary supplement and who perhaps even receives the social priority allowance. I am not sure that the average teacher described in the press notice would be recognised as average in many parts of the country.

The issue of affordability is critical. As I pointed out, there is no comfort for teachers who receive rises above inflation if the cost is losing their jobs because their governing body can no longer afford to employ them. For the last three years, teachers' pay rises have been staged. In 1991-92, there has been a particularly heavy end loading for basic pay and incentive allowances. In the view of teachers and LEAs, the average increase is more likely to be 10 per cent. than the 7·8 per cent. quoted by the Minister. It has often been claimed that the education standard spending assessment has not taken that end loading into account, bearing in mind the additional 2·9 per cent. on the pay bill compared with last year, and the fact that that has not been taken into account in SSAs.

The supplementary grant that we are discussing assumes that each authority has had an average increase of 6·7 per cent. My authority has had an education standard spending assessment rise of 5·8 per cent. The difference must be made up. The Minister may say that, in global

terms, that is not the case, but even his figures show that, in percentage terms, authorities in England must find more than authorities in Wales. In addition, many authorities receive much less than the average SSA increase.

Some hon. Members seem to have difficulty realising that, when talking about league tables and averages, some fall below the line of the average, so some authorities receive less than the average. Many of those are already up against their capping levels, and while the Minister said that capping levels would be irrelevant, they must still find the additional spending. Capping might be irrelevant in terms of the supplementary grant, but is it irrelevant for local authorities that must find additional money for the pay award?

For Durham county, that cost will be about £3 million, after receipt of the supplementary grant. Will that authority be able to raise its capping level? If so, will the Department of the Environment agree to that, or will that £3 million have to be found out of money allocated for existing commitments, meaning that other parts of the education budget will have to be cut? Will more teachers' jobs have to go? The Minister did not tackle that issue, about which local authorities are most concerned.

Mr. Fallon: I am particularly grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way so that we can continue our dialogue about Durham, which she began. She asked me a straight question about Durham's position. The straight answer is that Durham can increase its precept by 6·5 per cent. for 1992-93 before it reaches the ceiling at which it is likely to be capped. I hope that she will not pretend that non-salary costs outside the teachers' pay bill are running at 6·5 per cent. when inflation is only 4·5 per cent. I particularly hope that she will not exempt Durham from the search for efficiency savings, when Durham is the sixth worst delegater of central bureaucracy in the country.

Ms. Armstrong: The Department of Education and Science approved the delegated scheme in every authority, including Durham. Given the Minister's interest in Durham, I am sure that he was personally responsible for that. He answered my question clearly, and his answer was no, the Government will not raise the capping limits to take account of the additional moneys that authorities like Durham, Shropshire, Gloucestershire and Warwickshire will have to find to meet the teachers' pay bill. Warwickshire has postponed setting its budget because it is now in such disarray. It knows that it will be unable to set a budget without significant cuts in the education service. Because its education members do not want to do that, it now has no date for setting a budget.

Other authorities say that doing that will inevitably have a knock-on effect on other parts of education. It is generally accepted, by the Government as well as everyone else, that teachers' pay will now form a bigger proportion of the overall education budget. That means that less money will be available for other items.

The Minister has the cheek to talk about getting rid of surplus places. The Government have made it virtually impossible for local authorities to get rid of surplus places. They have approved a number of grant-maintained schools where the local authority was trying to deal with the problem of surplus places. They said that they needed to close the schools to deal with surplus places, which meant that the whole system was frozen. The schools to be closed then became grant-maintained, so the surplus places remained. The reorganisation of those schools has been turned down, and local authorities know that, if they seek further reorganisation, they are likely to be in exactly the same position, with their ability to deal with surplus places increasingly depleted.

It is—I was about to use unparliamentary language but I shall not do so—[HON. MEMBERS: "Go on, spoil yourself."] It is simply not on for Ministers to be so deceitful with the public about what they are doing. They have frozen the surplus places system and ensured that authorities are unable effectively to reorganise their schools.

Mr. Fallon: Just for the record, before the hysteria reaches new heights, may I point out that, of those schools approved for grant-maintained status, only a small minority were threatened with closure. Most of the others were not.

Ms. Armstrong: The Minister does not understand the implications of his legislation and actions. Some 35 to 40 per cent. of schools that have opted out were originally scheduled for closure. That has meant that the authorities are not prepared to introduce other schemes as they fear that the Government will encourage opting out, which will not help them to sort out their reorganisations. Until the Government take a more coherent line on that issue, we shall not find a solution to the problem of surplus places.

I was interested that the Minister said that we should look at the Audit Commission's report on school transport. He should think about what it would mean for Durham county, where many poor parents would be at a significant disadvantage when trying to gain access to schools for their children.

There is no truth in the Government's claim that they are fully funding the teachers' pay award. They are not, but they are pushing the problem down to schools. It will result in teachers losing their jobs. I do not believe, teachers do not believe and local authorities do not believe that the Government are dealing with education in a way that will raise standards and improve opportunities. They are saying to teachers, "Yes, you can have a pay rise, but by gum we shall make the rest of your job difficult."

11.11 pm

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): My hon. Friend the Minister referred to having met a delegation of Shropshire county councillors and Members of Parliament. We appreciated the interest and concern that he showed in the education problems that undoubtedly afflict that county. This evening, I wish, in a brief intervention, to reinforce the nature of those difficulties in order to help focus attention on how best to resolve them.

The additional grant is, of course, much appreciated, but in Shropshire's case that aid must be set in the context of the extent to which the 1991-92 pay award was staged and how the latter parts of the staging fall in the coming year. It must also be set in the context of the expectation of some Shropshire county councillors that the current pay award for 1992-93 would be staged, not paid in its entirety as has proved to be the case. Another relevant factor when considering the additional grant is that Government funding does not reflect the growth of numbers in education in the county of Shropshire.

However, the issue inevitably revolves around the methodology of the standard spending assessment. As my hon. Friend the Minister made clear, the additional grant is related to that methodology, so if it had some unintended deleterious consequence for a county—as it had for Shropshire—we must take account of that in these proceedings.

I very much appreciate it when my hon. Friend says that the matters will all be considered sympathetically and with sound realism, which is absolutely essential, as the result of the additional grant, and its related costs, for Shropshire has been that the county has been obliged to return to the policy of using reserves. Until the statement, the reserves were to be reduced by £4·5 million, and now the use of reserves has risen to £6 million—an increase of £1·5 million in use of reserves is implict in the issue to be resolved this evening. That policy cannot be countenanced for one moment. It is related to a highly critical situation, but it cannot be a permanent feature of the prudent financing of county affairs.

I believe that Shropshire is a prudent county. Its politics has been traditional, broken only by the election as Member of Parliament for Shrewsbury of Disraeli in the last century—a rather exotic performance. But Disraeli was not really representative of the county of Shropshire. Gladstone, who lived just over the border in Hawarden, was more typical of it, and the Gladstonian approach to public finance has characterised Shropshire. Let no one suppose that it is a kind of pastoral Lambeth with a slap-happy approach to financial affairs. It is not. It has played fair by public finance, and in return the county deserves fair play from the Government.

11.14 pm

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): The pay rise for teachers is to be warmly welcomed. For many years they have faced the problem of trying to catch up and even this increase will not put them on proper salaries—because of what has happened in the lifetime of this Government. Nevertheless, I am sure that the rise will do a little—not a lot—to retain some of the excellent teachers in our schools, particularly those who teach what have become known as the shortage subjects of science and mathematics.

The problem that the pay increase creates for local authorities is not to be underestimated. I was disappointed by the Minister tonight. He exhibited a mixture of complacency and total disregard for the way in which local education authorities need to budget.

The Government's advice during the past year has been clear: as local authorities budget for the coming financial year, they ought to allow for inflation of about 4 or 4·5 per cent. LEAs will have budgeted for that; certainly, East Sussex did.

The teachers' pay rise means that local authorities will have to find well over 3 per cent. and in some cases 3·8 per cent. increases within their overall budgets. We wait to see what help the Government will give them. The £56 million on offer tonight is nowhere near enough to make up the difference between the figure that LEAs budgeted for and the sum that they will have to pay out. The Government should at least come clean about that. The Minister acknowledged it tonight, so he cannot have it both ways.

East Sussex is no different from Shropshire and many other local authorities. The gap in the figures remains worrying. East Sussex is spending up to the maximum of its SSA this year; its balances are not huge and its contingency reserves are not enough to pay out the necessary sum.

The Government are offering my authority help of only £670,000. This afternoon I attended the budget meeting of East Sussex county council, on which I still serve as a councillor. Members of all parties on the council do not doubt that they will have to find at least £2 million more to meet the requisite sum. It is complacent of the Minister to argue that the Government money is enough. It is not enough for East Sussex, and I suspect that it is not enough for most local authorities——

Mr. Fallon: The hon. Gentleman seems to suggest that East Sussex council relied solely on the Government's forecast of 4 to 4·5 per cent. inflation this year. I hope that he is not implying that his county treasurer took no notice of the announced increase in education standard spending of 7·2 per cent. last November.

Mr. Bellotti: I have known our county treasurer for many years, and I can say that he is one of the most excellent, professional county treasurers in the country. I have great respect for his professional capabilities. Each year in his post he has found that the Government, through their settlements to local authorities and by their legislation, have made his job increasingly difficult—they have forced local authorities to spend more money in certain areas. I am surprised if the Minister is imputing any lack of professionalism to East Sussex. Perhaps I should not be surprised, since the Minister said tonight—*Hansard* will bear me out—that the "great bulk" of this expense is being met by the Government. The local government management board has calculated that the sum provided by the Government is £300 million short.

I have examined the figures and, in the context of the local authorities that I know well, that figure is not far off the mark. It is certainly a couple of million pounds in East Sussex. Another local authority that I know extremely well, because I recently looked at its accounts and spoke about them in the House, is the London borough of Sutton. It will receive help of only £192,000. Judging by the Sutton accounts that I looked at only a week or so ago, that borough could find itself short of upwards of £1 million as a result of the announcement.

Many of the local authorities that are spending up to the maximum of their SSA have precious little in balances left and have in their contingency funds sufficient to meet only a reasonable increase. Government rules will force those authorities to cut services. It is reported that the Secretary of State for Education and Science has said that the release of £60 million—it is only £56 million—from Government reserves would enable education authorities to meet the 7·8 per cent. real terms rise. Surely the Government recognise that the £56 million will not meet the whole cost. If they do, they are even more incapable than I thought they were, because the sums do not add up.

If local education authorities are unable to meet the cost, up to 12,500 teaching posts will have to be cut. The Minister may say that there is no need for such cuts, but if he does and also places a cap on local authority expenditure, he will be inconsistent. Perhaps the Minister would suggest that other local government services could be cut. Perhaps social services and care for the elderly could be cut to pay for the teachers. Perhaps the Minister would like to shut all the libraries in the country. A cut in councils' road building programmes might be suggested. Such cuts could be the effect of the sums that the Government are providing.

The Government cannot have it both ways. *Hansard* will show that the Minister said that there are two other ways in which local authorities might meet the cost. One was through efficiency savings and the other was through surplus places. Either the Minister meets the full cost—he nodded a few moments ago to show that he would—or he secretly accepts that not enough money is to be provided for education authorities and he expects cuts in services.

Year after year in recent times, all local authorities have sought efficiency savings because that is the only way that they have any chance whatever to continue to provide services. That is because the Government continue to reduce funding while increasing legislation. To save on surplus places, education authorities would have to close whole schools. In East Sussex, the Audit Commission once suggested that a secondary school should be shut in the north of the county. The cost of shutting it was greater than that of keeping it open, because we would have had to bus 500 children at least 15 miles either way to the nearest school. The savings were merely paper figures and not real cash.

The Minister's arguments do not bear any examination. The Government's complacency on the issue makes it clear that once again they are attacking local government and making more and more difficult the delivery of the important education service. They have lost all credibility with the people who know anything about these matters.

As I listened to the Minister, I thought, "Has he ever been to a council meeting? Has he ever with an open mind discussed anything with a local councillor of any party? Has he ever had experience of looking at budgets of local authorities?" Either he has not, and he should, or he has and this is a deliberate confidence trick on those who have to balance the budgets of our local authorities.

The people out there are rumbling the Government. Proposals that are totally inadequate to meet the needs of the situation show that the Government's time is running out. It will be either more cuts in local authority spending or it will be teachers' pay. It is not the Government who are paying, for the Government's £56 million is but 20 or 25 per cent. of the real cost. The Minister knows that, and it is a disgrace that he has presented us with these figures.

11.25 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): I shall speak for only a few minutes, being mindful of the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen).

I was interested in the remarks of the hon. Member—the hereditary Member—for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong). They bore no relation, however, to what the Government are seeking to do and its implications. I found it frightening that a serious debate should attract the hyperbole and the rhetoric that the Butlin representative—the hon. Lady—insisted on giving us.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is not in the Chamber. He could perhaps have used the opportunity to provide another example of further endorsement of the Government's education reforms. The only hope that I have of him is that, when he finally finishes turning, his face will end up at the front. In the unlikely event of that, perhaps we shall hear even more from the hon. Member for Durham, North-West.

It is strange that we are talking about an increase of 7·8 per cent. in such negative terms. The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) made only one positive remark when he said that he welcomed it. He then proceeded to be wholly negative, in the way that one would expect from a newcomer to the House who will remain here for such a short time.

Anyone who congratulates the Government on an above-average increase will surely have to explain to the electorate that the policies of the Labour party would effectively, as a result of taxation structure, immediately wipe out the benefit of an above-average increase in teachers' pay. I noted that the hon. Member for Durham, North-West did not refer to the taxation policies of her party.

As more and more schools become grant-maintained, there must ultimately be savings to be made as the bureaucracy of the local education authority is reduced. In my constituency, four grammar schools are grant-maintained. Given their new status, they will call less and less upon the services provided by Kent county council. The obvious response of Opposition Members is, "We'll have none of that. We shall close everything down and control everything in a comprehensive structure." I think that there will be argument in favour of the Government taking further action in terms of standard spending assessment methodology and the high cost of attracting and retaining teachers in the south-east, including London. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will comment on that. My view is that ultimately we should move to local cost-centred pay bargaining at school level and away from national pay deals.

My hon. Friend the Minister made an important response in answer to the hon. Member for Eastbourne when he said that in November 1991 a 7·2 per cent. award was made for the rate support grant settlement for 1992-93. I remember that during my time at the Department of Education and Science I was reminded on many occasions that teachers' pay accounts for only about half education expenditure. Consequently, there must be room for savings elsewhere.

I have much sympathy for those who work in local eudcation authorities. Indeed, my wife is one such person. She is a member of the Kent education authority. It will be difficult, of course, for authorities to provide money in the way that has been outlined this evening, but that is the

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challenge of local government. Savings can be made. We must make clear the need to find the best value for best services within the remit of the services, whether they are provided by the LEA or by private agencies.

I warmly welcome the steps that the Government have taken. I warmly welcome also the enthusiastic endorsement of the increase in pay. I know that teachers in my constituency will welcome the increase, as so many of them will benefit from it. Bearing in mind the strictures of the Opposition, I confirm my total support for the Government's actions.

11.29 pm

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): I speak for the children of Staffordshire, and, in particular, for the children of my constituency.

For the third year running, Staffordshire has been given a below-average increase in standard spending assessment. It is third from the bottom of the league table of county councils. If Staffordshire had been given the national average SSA, we would be talking of increased expenditure rather than a cut in services. If it had been allowed the same SSA as Bedforshire, Berkshire, Hertfordshire, Isle of Wight, Oxfordshire, Essex, Surrey, East Sussex, Buckinghamshire, Kent—the county of the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn)—Hampshire or West Sussex, we would be able to plan big improvements for the children of Staffordshire. All the counties that I have listed are at the top of the SSA list.

Instead, Staffordshire faces a cut of £7 million in our education budget, and will have to find a further £1·4 million as a result of this measure and the Government's decision not to fund the 7·5 per cent. teachers' pay rise in full. My constituents are angry about the way in which their children are being treated, and I am very angry about it too.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Golding: No, I will not. There is not much time.

The damage that will be done to our children's prospects is disproportionate to the short-term savings that Staffordshire is being forced to achieve. The teaching staff in our schools are already overstretched; there are not enough resources for books and materials, and many buildings are badly in need of repair. Meanwhile, the Department of Education and Science tips out glossy pamphlets by the ton. A teacher at Ravensmead school, Bignall End, in my constituency, gave me a two-foot pile of instruction pamphlets that she had been sent.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Golding: No.

That teacher asked me to give the pamphlets to the Minister, but they are so heavy that I have so far been unable to carry them into the building. She received them from the Department last year, and is now being told, "Throw them away—they are useless. We shall be sending you another lot this year."

What a waste of money. Why cannot all that money be spent where it is needed—on our children? We need to give our children a good education. Why cannot the children of Staffordshire be given a better deal by this uncaring Government? Why cannot they be given a fair share of the money that is allocated for education? Our children deserve a lot better than to be used as a political football by an uncaring Conservative Government.

11.32 pm

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): I shall base my brief remarks on experience of my local authority and local education authority in Birmingham. I feel that it may have been specifically in regard to my local education authority that my hon. Friend the Minister referred to the scope for savings to be made.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: As the 1974 candidate for Newcastle-under-Lyme, I wish to place it on record—I hope that my hon. Friend will agree with me—that one of the great tragedies was the abolition of the grammar schools by the then Labour Administration. It was that abolition that deprived the children to whom the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) referred of the choices and opportunities that they should have had—and would have had, if a Conservative Government had been in power at the time.

Mr. Hargreaves: I am grateful, as always, for my hon. Friend's intervention.

Let me return to the matter in hand. I want to take up a couple of points made by the hon. Member—the hereditary Member—for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong). She said that a large number of schools became grant-maintained as a result of the threat of closure. As a Member representing a constituency which has its own extremely successful grant-maintained school, Baverstock, and which has two, if not three, further schools which may be thinking of grant-maintained status —all because they are oversubscribed and because the local education authority will not provide the necessary funds for parents who wish to send their children to them or for facilities for the children—may I point out to the hon. Member for Durham, North-West that she has not got her facts right? In my experience and that of the pupils of south Birmingham, grant-maintained schools have been successful and they were not faced with closure. Quite the reverse: they were the most successful schools in the area.

As to the scope for savings, about which the hon. Lady seemed to be a little sketchy, Birmingham local education authority has been written up in all the newspapers, local and national, as admitting that it did not spend some £60 million of the amount that the Department allowed it to spend on education. Instead, it spent the money elsewhere. It has admitted to newspapers, and to anybody else who asks, that the salaries of other people—not teachers—have come out of that budget.

When the Minister rightly remarked that there is substantial scope in some cases for savings to be made by local education authorities—for example, from surplus places, on which Birmingham is one of the worst offenders —he was within his rights in pointing that out to the House. Although there may be other areas where that does not happen, such as those referred to by the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding), I hope that she and they will recognise that in Birmingham it is flagrantly the case.

The House should bear in mind that the Minister is not inventing an example. He has a classic case, with Birmingham being the largest local authority and

therefore having the largest SSA and the largest education budget, which it has not spent correctly. Therefore, the House should support my hon. Friend's measure.

11.36 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The two evils of the poll tax were the flat rate system and the standard spending assessment. The standard spending assessment will still be with us, even under the move by the Government towards a council tax, and will be altered only when there is a change of Government. The standard spending assessment needs to be radically adjusted so that areas that are deprived will begin to have moneys spent on them. Without extra money from central Government grants to local government, there could be a dramatic redistribution just by altering the arrangements for the standard spending assessment itself.

We have heard of counties which have been badly affected by the standard spending assessment. I am from Derbyshire, at the bottom of the league when comparing grant-related expenditure assessment in 1989-90 and when comparing standard spending assessment in 1992-93. As regards the increase in the amount, some authorities have got almost twice as much.

Furthermore, for standard spending assessment, North East Derbyshire district council, which covers the bulk of my constituency, is second from the bottom of all district councils in England and Wales. It is next only to East Dorset, being 335th out of 336. Someone has to be at the bottom of the league table, but there should be justification for it and there should not be massive disparities between areas, for instance, in SSA per poll tax payer.

Several hon. Members have made the point that, if there is something wrong with the standard spending assessments, it is multiplied by the development that we are considering now. Extra money is welcome, but it is especially welcome in areas that have favourable SSAs. Other areas, such as Derbyshire, will be at a very considerable disadvantage.

A deputation from North-East Derbyshire met one of the Environment Ministers to discuss district council SSAs. I do not know whether the meeting did much good. Afterwards we had an SSA improvement of a mere £3,000, but we lost £18,000 in terms of revenue support grant. In other words, after the representations we were worse off. That has happened despite the fact that we know very fully the factors that are involved in building up SSAs. We know that it is a fiddled system, which hits areas such as north-east Derbyshire in an unbelievable way.

Many of the same principles come into operation with regard to Derbyshire as a whole. Having targeted some of the London authorities, the Government look to Derbyshire as one of the favourite areas for targeting. However, despite a very favourable press in the south of Derbyshire, of which the Government can make use, targeting has never worked politically—it has never worked at elections. What is needed is a massive overhaul of the standard spending assessment. The deputation from North East Derbyshire did not thump the table, but it presented its case firmly. Although it was received respectfully, it was not given anything.

I hope that for Derbyshire county council we shall have similar arrangements for discussion of the general standard spending assessment, and not just of the situation with regard to education—although that is part of the total package. I wrote to the Secretary of State for the Environment and today or yesterday, received a reply that merely defended the Department's position. The reply rejected the case for a deputation to put these points forward. Authorities should be enabled to present their cases, and should be listened to. In time, that would provide an opportunity for adjustment of these factors. Derbyshire county council wishes to be on the list. It needs a chance to be heard. This must be done fairly quickly, as after 9 April it will be with different Ministers that we shall want to discuss these matters, and there will be a much more favourable environment.

11.43 pm

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to make three brief points towards the end of this debate. I shall start by declaring an interest: I am one of the three parliamentary representatives of the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association.

I echo the welcome of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) and of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) for the very basis of this order, which, we should not forget, implements the pay increase awarded to teachers through the pay review body. For a number of years, we have been told that one of the problems for teachers is not just pay but the general morale of the profession. The pay review body is one of the measures that the Government introduced for the purpose of improving morale.

It should be appreciated that the increases that the review body has recommended have been implemented in full. That is a good start, although I agree that we should like to see some catching up achieved over the years. Our schools need teachers of the very highest quality. We have many good teachers. We want to see them well rewarded, and we want others to be brought into the profession and to adhere to the very highest standards.

Secondly, amid all the doom and gloom spoken about schools, I yesterday visited Our Lady of Lourdes primary school in my constituency——

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): A good Catholic school.

Mr. Burt: Indeed, it is a very good Catholic school. I spent an excellent morning there and had an enjoyable time with staff and pupils. Of course difficulties were discussed, but the general professional approach of the school belied so many of the doom and gloom comments made about it. The teachers were doing their best and doing well. The Minister knows of my concern that, although teachers generally welcome many of our reforms, the pace of reform is sometimes too fast and sometimes obscures the best of what we are doing.

Problems of finance in my constituency have sometimes been exacerbated and cannot be separated from the general financial performance of the local authority. Yes, local authority spending on education in my constituency is being affected and the formula may take some of the blame, but my authority has had opportunities to make representations about the formula. It has not made full use of those representations, and I am sorry about that. Where savings can be made and efficiency improved, all authorities have a duty to attempt that. I agree that the formula could be further examined. It is kept under

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constant review, but my authority is one of those subject to the mysteries of the formula which never seems to do it any favours.

The difference in approach between the Conservative authority which used to look after Bury and the current Labour authority is that the Conservative party did its best to live within its budget guidelines, but the Labour authority appears not to do so. The consequence has been extra pressure on schools, a pressure which they ill deserve.

This is a good pay award. I appreciate the Government's efforts to increase grant spending to assist authorities to pay for it, but we should not separate the performance of local authorities and the effects that their adherence to budgets might have on schools. That should also be taken into account.

11.46 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): The debate has centred on the provision of education, but the report refers to local government finance in England so the environment teams—those from the Government and the Opposition—have an interest in it. We are paired from the discussions on local government in Committee, and I am sure that the discussions on education match those that we have heard in the Committee debating the Local Government Bill.

We want teachers to be properly paid for their work and the settlement brings some reward, to which teachers are entitled. However, to include only the award in the additional grant does not solve the problem facing local government, and in particular the education authorities. The fear of the loss of teachers is most likely because the overall budget for local authorities has been limited to a mere 4·8 per cent. above current year spending.

I make that point because, when the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science, the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon), referred to the 7·2 per cent. increase in expenditure, I wondered whether he was referring to the Government's estimate of what the expenditure in the coming year will be, or to actual expenditure. There is a difference, and that difference means that local authorities are facing financial hardship because of the limit that has been placed on expenditure above the current year's expenditure.

Even taking into account the top-up measure, there is still a shortfall of about £300 million if the settlement awarded is to be implemented without problems and tears. Such a shortfall means that the equivalent of 12,500 teaching jobs could go. The extra £60 million proposed by the Government covers only 0·6 per cent. of the overall 7·8 per cent. increase in teachers' pay. Without a proper and significant review of the full cost of teachers' salaries, £15,500 classroom jobs will go.

The Minister referred to the letter sent by the chief education officer for North Yorkshire county council in which he said that there would be no loss of jobs in North Yorkshire. Could the chief of police in North Yorkshire write the same letter? If resources are being transferred from one head of expenditure in the county budget to another, one can understand how the Minster could make such comments. However, if he analyses the budget of North Yorkshire, he will find that the police are suffering. That matter should be considered by people in North Yorkshire.

Even with the award, there will be a loss of more than 1,400 teachers in the Yorkshire and Humberside region. We must therefore consider the level of the award. Councillor Jeremy Beecham, the chairman of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, sent a letter to the Prime Minister on 6 February pointing out the need for the award made to schoolteachers to be fully funded through the grant system. The £60 million does not meet the demands that will be made by LEAs on the resources of local authorities.

The Secretary of State has said more than once that he intends to use the capping powers on local authority budgets. That procedure now applies to local authorities throughout the country. The fact that local authorities have to cap themselves must be addressed when we consider local education budgets. It may be correct that each local authority has to decide its own service priorities, as the Secretary of State tells local authorities. However, that freedom is severely constrained partly by the statutory requirements to provide a range of services and partly, and more so, by the limits set on total expenditure for local authorities—the capping procedure.

Local authorities have carried out a self-disciplined capping for the past two or three years, but there are limits to what they can do. My authority of Wakefield, on which I used to serve, has had to reduce its budget for education by £1 million this year to meet the capping criteria. It is misleading to say that the Government are funding the pay award in full. Local authorities are having to make cuts in other areas, and in education, to meet the capping limits which can be set by the Secretary of State.

When the procedure involves a reduction in services, it is often the non-mandatory services that are cut first. The services most likely to be cut in education are the youth service, adult education and library services. They are the first to go before the schools sector is exposed to the economies.

After such cutting is exhausted, the maintenance and upgrading of schools must be considered by the Government. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), will comment on the way in which the local authorities face hardship and problems because of the capping procedure and because of the foolishness of the way in which the poll tax procedure still applies in many areas of local authority work. The anomalies in the poll tax procedure also mean that local authorities are having difficulties in collecting their poll tax payments.

I appeal to the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment to examine the position constructively and to report to the Secretary of State the real hardship that is being created in local authorities by the lack of funding to meet the pay award.

11.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): It is far too long since I took part in an education debate. As one of their most regular attenders, I have missed them very much. I am delighted to be able to speak for the Department of the Environment in the three or so minutes that the Opposition have left me.

I thank all those who have taken part in the debate and ask them to forgive me, because I will not have time properly to address all the anxieties that they have raised. I begin by saying that education debates have not changed. There is the absurd assumption that Conservative Members wish to denigrate teachers and not use their services. What a lot of silly twaddle, as ever. There should be no doubt that not only do I have a high regard for our teachers and wish to see them properly rewarded but I believe in teachers in the state system, to the extent that all my children have been educated at state schools.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): May I remind my hon. Friend of the excellent exchange that I had with the Secretary of State for the Environment on standard spending assessments and the revenue support grant the other day in the House? Following that, this large advertisement appeared in our local newspaper, from which I shall quote, Mr. Deputy Speaker, entitled "Can balances be raided?" My hon. Friend the Minister might recall that I had a public meeting on the island to ask why the Liberal Democrats were not taking from the balances. Will my hon. Friend look at the Local Government Act 1986 on prohibition of political publicity? It seems to me that the advertisement offends against that Act. I hope that I may have the support of the Department of the Environment in taking on the Liberal Democrats on this matter. It is £1,250-worth of advertising for political propaganda.

Mr. Key: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Not only will I read the relevant Act but I will read the advertisement if he will send it to me. I will consider it carefully within my Department.

We have heard a lot about the need for extra money for funding education in general, and the teachers' pay award in particular. We have heard how inadequate are both the settlement in general and the additional grant in particular. Unwelcome though it may be to some hon. Members, we ought to apply a measure of reality to those claims.

Since 1990, the total provision for local authority spending has increased by over 27 per cent. Within that total, the level of financial support distributed to authorities by central Government has risen by over 43 per cent. This year's settlement represents a 7·1 per cent. increase on last year's figure—well ahead of inflation. In addition, we have recognised the major extra burden that authorities face this year in preparing for the council tax, by providing specific grant totalling £86 million towards those costs, which is outside and additional to aggregate external finance.

So the major new burden facing authorities in 1992-93 need not eat into the general increase that they have received. Now we have this further additional grant for the teachers' pay award. But still Opposition Members ask for more. If yet more resources were devoted to education, we would still need to be clear about where they should be found. Do those who call for more believe that less should be devoted to other services? If so, which ones? Tonight we have the education lobby of the Labour party with us. Have those Members consulted the health lobby, the overseas development lobby, the housing lobby? Have they consulted the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith)? Or has he ruled himself out in Labour's game?

Or should the resources available to local authorities be increased by a further £2 billion, as local authority associations and some Opposition Members suggest? Opposition Members have offered no explanation of where the extra £2 billion is to come from. Merely to call for extra resources without identifying where they will come from is, to say the least, irresponsible.

The settlement provided for a 7·1 per cent. increase in education standard spending. The grant that we are debating is additional to that. If we accept that at 7·8 per cent., the pay award is greater than anticipated in formulating the settlement, is it true that authorities are having to find resources this year to fund the overhang from the 1991-92 pay award, I ask myself?

We should remember that teachers' pay accounts for more than half of local authority spending on education. Other costs to education——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business).*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Additional Grant Report (England) 1992-93 (House of Commons Paper No. 264), a copy of which was laid before this House on 17th February, be approved.

Army Bill *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Army Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

11.58 pm

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): The money resolution concerns section 2 of the Armed Forces Act 1966, in relation to the Ulster Defence Regiment. It concerns extra expenditure for the Army in Northern Ireland and that is the topic on which I propose to address the House briefly in the minutes available to me.

I realise that it is late, and I do not wish to detain the House for long; however, it is important that people realise that the key to effective security is intelligence. In recent days, we have had an eloquent example of how the effective exploitation of intelligence can prevent terrorist incidents, and how additional money put into the exploitation of intelligence can be used to the advantage of the military authorities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I realise that the hon. Gentleman is still on his preamble, but I must remind him that the money resolution is very narrow, and directly concerns expenditure related to the Ulster Defence Regiment. It would not be in order to introduce wider issues about intelligence.

Mr. Allason: I am grateful for the Chair's guidance. I propose to address the House on the 1966 Act in relation to the Ulster Defence Regiment, and to additional funds for the payment, support, welfare and, if necessary, resettlement and long-term security provision for intelligence sources. That goes to the heart of the money resolution.

How is one to acquire important intelligence in the Province? Certainly, technical surveillance has a role, as do radio and telephone intercepts. There is limited scope for clandestine surveillance. The real key, where money is involved, is in relation to agents.

I wish to draw the attention of the House to a recent case, that of Brian Nelson—a soldier who spent six years in the Black Watch, subsequently became entangled with the Ulster Defence Association and then moved to Germany. He was persuaded to return to Northern Ireland by the Army. In the years that followed, he was paid the princely sum of approximately £200 a week to supply information to the security authorities.

I hold no brief for Brian Nelson. I do not believe that he was an angel, although—in his defence—it was said at the time that he saved the lives of about 200 people. I am not going to stray from the——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, again, but I am finding it difficult to relate what he is saying to the narrow money order before the House.

Mr. Allason: The money resolution relates to the provision of money to the Ulster Defence Regiment, which is the subject that I am tackling.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is not quite that. It only relates to the amalgamation to which the Bill applies.

Mr. Allason: I thank the Chair for guidance. I have studied the 1966 Act, especially section 2. I hope that the Chair recognises that that is the topic of the money resolution.

My concern is not that the source was the victim of the Stevens inquiry. I do not think he was. However, it is in the long-term interests of the country and of the security of the people of Northern Ireland that sufficient money should be provided to ensure that people who volunteer information to the security authorities should not merely be rewarded at that time. It should be certain that they and their families will be looked after in the years ahead.

I shall give a brief illustration of what is likely to happen if the authorities fail to give that support.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman again, but money resolutions, by the nature of things, are extremely narrow. He is now raising a much wider issue and, rather than having me keep interrupting him, it would be much more in his interests if he were to find another opportunity to raise this issue.

Mr. Allason: The money resolution relates to how money is spent in support of the Ulster Defence Regiment. It is important to consider how the people of Northern Ireland are to be protected.

Unless people are given long-term security, instead of long-term prison sentences, the authorities will be unlikely in the future to get the co-operation of those who are in a position to volunteer information to UDR or related organisations. I do not believe that my comments are straying from the resolution, particularly when Mr. Nelson, once he is released from prison, is likely to be a target not just of the UDA, which regards him as a traitor, but of the Provisional IRA. That organisation is now fully aware of his activities.

Unless money is made available, long term, for the protection and resettlement of such individuals, it will always be——

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Has the hon. Gentleman considered how much the newspaper, television and film rights of Mr. Nelson's experiences will be worth?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. You see, this is the trouble: we are now about to start a debate that is a long way from the money resolution. I know that the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) feels strongly about this issue, but he must find another opportunity on which to raise it. It is not at all in order to do so on this money resolution.

Question put and agreed to.

TIMESHARE BILL *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Timeshare Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to provisions for the enforcement of the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

PETITION

Opencast Mining (South Wales)

12.6 am

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): I beg leave to present a petition on the expansion of opencast coal mining in south Wales.

The petition, which is made up of a terrific number of sheets of paper, has been signed by more than 19,000 people from the coal-mining areas of south Wales. The title page is beautifully presented and written in Welsh. I understand that it is the first petition to be presented in the Welsh language. Unfortunately, the rules of the House do not permit me to read the petition in Welsh, but in translation it reads as follows:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will urge the Secretary of State for Wales to consider that coalfield communities should not be subjected to opencast coal mining against their wishes, and to introduce new guidelines which more adequately safeguard the environment, development needs and cultural heritage of the people of the coalfield communities of South Wales.

To lie upon the Table.

Primary Schools (Norfolk)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

12.10 am

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): I wish tonight to discuss the situation concerning small schools in west Norfolk. The Minister will be aware that in the western area of Norfolk county council there are 26 schools, each with fewer than 45 pupils. Many people regard schools with between, say, 45 and 70 pupils as small. In the Norfolk context, a small school has fewer than 45 pupils.

We must not overlook the role of small schools in our rural communities. In many cases, the school is all that villages have left. We in Norfolk have seen a tremendous decline in employment in agriculture. Farms that used to employ 20 or 30 people now employ two or three, or perhaps even one person. Many shops and small businesses in villages have closed. Many villages are often left with just one pub. That has meant a considerable decline in the rural economy in the past 50 years or so.

I am confident that the rural economy will be revived in the future. A focal point of village life is the school. The local community can unite around that focal point, which is a social centre and is often the very heart of the village. So the argument whether small schools are socially desirable has been won, and we must go on to examine the educational aspects of the matter. Can a small school with perhaps 35 pupils deliver the national curriculum in the 1990s? Can it, in a building that is restricted, meet modern educational demands?

Nor can we overlook the cost of such schools. I recently asked county hall for the figures, and there is no doubt that the cost of educating children in very small schools is expensive. In a school with 20 pupils, the cost per capita per annum is £2,777, whereas the cost in another primary school with 463 pupils is £1,039. Those figures are based on revenue costs only—day-to-day running costs—and do not take account of other important factors. The smaller the school, the more it receives from the LEA out of centrally held resources.

We must keep an eye on the cost, because time and again, when the argument is about whether a school should close or remain open, the issue of cost per pupil is raised. But we must look beyond the cost—at education and the role of small schools in the community. I have been examining carefully the way in which small schools have been gearing up to deliver the national curriculum and how they are delivering it in the early days. My findings are encouraging. Across the board, smaller schools are able to deliver the national curriculum, and their results—in terms of the number of pupils who have gone on to secondary schools—are, in the main, extremely creditable and compare favourably with larger schools in the locality.

I shall tonight focus on one school in particular—Harpley, a small school with 29 pupils which two years ago was subjected to an inspection by the inspectorate and advisory service. The report from that service is dated November 1989. After the inspectorate went into all aspects of Harpley school and examined every detail of the education on offer, it concluded:

"The staff at Harpley V.C. Primary School have made exemplary progress in preparing to implement the national

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curriculum. The children are receiving an excellent education and excellent experience across the core curriculum, and some very high quality work is being achieved."

The final conclusion was:

"As has been shown, the three schools are at a very different stage of readiness. One school's preparations are as thorough and as advanced as any seen in the county by members of the inspection team. In this case, Harpley, it seems reasonable to conclude that the professional commitment and enterprise of the two members of staff, and their skill in harnessing the talents of a wider community, will continue to ensure a lively core curriculum for pupils."

Harpley school came out of that report with flying colours. Until recently, however, a cloud of uncertainty hung over the school because the county council had said that it was one of the schools that it was considering closing, largely on the grounds of cost and because over the next few years the numbers would probably fall. The county council's projected figures are refuted vigorously by the chairman of governors, but I am pleased to say that, at a recent meeting of the area sub-committee, the school was given a definitive reprieve. It has decided to go ahead and appoint a full-time head on a three-year contract, so the cloud of uncertainty has been lifted and there has been much rejoicing in Harpley.

I had a chance to go around the school yesterday and I met local County Councillor George Pratt and the chairman of governors, Neil Steed. They were extremely pleased that the "siege mentality", to use their words, has now disappeared. They are now looking to the future because they feel that they can build on the foundations of that encouraging inspectorate report. They also feel strongly that they have the total support of the community. Councillor Pratt was recently given a petition signed by every person on the electoral roll in Harpley and the village next door, Houghton. There is every possibility of the school's drawing on those resources in the community. For example, Harpley has a skilled piano player who teaches at the school, and other parents and welfare assistants help in the school. That is all part and parcel of a community rallying round and turning a small school into a great success.

The consideration of standards and the national curriculum must underpin all that. I shall be watching carefully how the results progress over the years now that the cloud of uncertainty has been lifted. Its progress will be combined with the prospect of future development in Harpley. The village has recently attracted a growth in the number of small firms and is now reviving. I mentioned earlier the decline in rural economies, but Harpley has attracted eight new small business in a managed workshop yard in a disused farm. There is a prospect of more young families moving into both Harpley and Houghton, which is primarily an estate village that belongs to Lord Cholmondeley, who has taken over the estate since his father died. There is a strong possibility of more young couples moving into Houghton, and that in turn will mean a greater demand for places at Harpley school and, we hope, the numbers will grow.

Building on the foundation of the inspector's report and on what the local management of schools has to offer, the governors are looking forward to the autonomy and control over the school's affairs. In all such small schools, governors have been faced with the burden of paperwork. There has been a flurry of education reforms and governors have been deluged with paperwork. The time has now come for a period of consolidation. Will the Minister comment on that?

I believe that Harpley's future is bright and encouraging. Clearly, it lies in the hands of the community. The school has an excellent team of governors with a tremendous amount of commitment. It has the prospect of a full-time head, for whom it will advertise shortly and I hope that someone suitable will apply.

I am pleased that Norfolk county council has moved away from too rigid and didactic an approach to small schools. It now says that a figure cannot be laid down to determine whether a school should be vulnerable to closure, but that every school must be considered on its merits. I pay tribute to the chairman of the education committee, Mrs. Francis Rohalle, and the county education officer, Michael Edwards, for their pragmatic, sensible approach, which will be widely welcomed in many quarters.

I congratulate Norfolk county council on the target that it has set for the devolution of money to schools for this financial year. It is to be 85·3 per cent., which is above the 85 per cent. target, which will mean that it will have £500,000 a year for schools ahead of target. I welcome that, and congratulate the council on being in the vanguard of devolving money to schools under the local management of schools.

Norfolk has always spent its capital funds wisely. In the current financial year it will spend £5·25 million on the schools capital programme. It receives £3·1 million in Government grant, although it asked for much more than that, as one would expect—it asked for £13 million. The formula currently used by the Department of Education and Science for the allocation of capital funds militates against Norfolk, which is unsatisfactory.

As the Minister will know, the formula used lays down two key criteria: basic needs and surplus places. I understand that improvements and the need to put repairs in progress rate low down the list or priorities. Will the Minister comment on that, as the formula militates against counties such as Norfolk, Suffolk and Yorkshire, where there are large numbers of small primary schools where, by definition, there are significant numbers of surplus places? It does not make sense for a school to be penalised for having surplus places.

The Minister may well ask whether schools such as Harpley can deliver the standards of education required. One is talking about the science curriculum and teaching languages, and the fact that a much more demanding set of standards will be asked of staff, teachers and parents. One way forward lies with the federation concept. In Norfolk there are already six federations for small schools, whereby a number of small schools are grouped in a loose federation and answer to a high school in their district.

Until recently, each region contained a federation co-ordinator. The federation of which Harpley was a member was based at Litcham high school. The idea behind the federation was that the schools should pool resources, help one another and have a full-time co-ordinator running the scheme. The small schools could plug into the resources of the other schools in the locality. If two or three of the schools were short of a language teacher but there was an excellent language teacher in one of the other schools, the skills of the teacher could be shared throughout all the schools. The concept behind such a federation makes a lot of sense.

However, the post of co-ordinator of the Litcham federation was funded 60 per cent. through the DES education, support and training grant. It worked extremely well for three years, until the Government decided to withdraw the grant, which was regrettable. I know that the money has been reallocated elsewhere in the overall education budget. The Government have put more money into education in real terms, and I congratulate them on that, but in terms of targeting resources, holding back a small amount of expenditure and not making it all over to the local education authorities can result in good value for money. The Litcham federation was one such example, but it has fallen victim to a change in Government policy, and I should like to ask the Minister why.

The Minister would be surprised if I did not mention one school in my constituency—Syderstone school. He had the misfortune of having to confirm its closure. The Minister will remember only too well that numbers at the school fell to a ridiculous level, from about 50 some two or three years earlier to about 20. Parents were voting with their feet and sending their children to nearby Sculthorpe airfield school.

When we met, the Minister was candid enough to say to me, "The village of Syderstone effectively has two schools, yet you are saying that those schools should remain open." He was right in many ways to say that that did not make sense, although it was a bitter blow to the community. We understood the logic behind the decision, although we obviously opposed it and fought hard to keep the school open.

The situation has moved on. The Ministry of Defence has decided that it will definitely close RAF Sculthorpe and RAF West Raynham. If those two bases close, the position in which Sculthorpe airfield school finds itself will be dramatically altered. My plea to the county council is that it should keep its options open at all costs. If it sells the Syderstone school building and the playing area, the option of one day reopening the school could be closed down for ever. I do not want to cast seeds of doubt over Sculthorpe airfield school. The situation is volatile and continually changing. It would indeed be unfortunate if the county council acted precipitately and sold the buildings or grounds. It must find alternative uses for the school, perhaps as a day centre. The playing area might be let to the local community or soccer team. The council should at least keep the school and grounds in mothballs for the future.

In the 1990s parents want choice. The small schools of this country can play an important part in what is on offer. As long as they can deliver high standards of education and deliver the national curriculum, there must be a role for them, especially in a county such as Norfolk. I believe that Norfolk county council sets some of the highest standards in the country. I believe passionately that we must ensure that parents are guaranteed choice. One of the ingredients of that choice will be in the form of a number of small primary schools, in which numbers will never be able to build up beyond certain levels. Within the confines of their restricted numbers, these schools can offer high standards. I believe that they have an important future in Norfolk; I hope that the Minister shares my view of the future, and my concern.

12.26 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Michael Fallon): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) on having secured this Adjournment debate. It is typical of the diligence with which the represents the interests of his constituents. I know how highly he values the small primary schools in his constituency, because he comes to see me about them, and I am glad of this opportunity to add my own tribute to the dedication and professionalism of teachers in small primary schools, not only in north-west Norfolk, but throughout the country.

Whenever small rural primary schools are discussed, emotions tend to run high. That is a pity, because experience shows that, just as there are good and bad large schools, so there are good and bad small schools. It is important for local education authorities to consider each school on its merits, rather than to seek to lump together all schools of a particular size or type when considering change. I can certainly assure my hon. Friend again that when proposals for change fall to be determined by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, he invariably considers each proposal on its individual merits.

It has to be acknowledged that small schools are much more costly than larger schools, and it is to my hon. Friend's credit that he did not shrink from this part of the argument. It must be right for rural education authorities such as Norfolk to consider, from time to time, whether their charge payers are getting good value for money. Not so long ago Norfolk calculated that its small primary schools—those with around 30 or fewer pupils on the roll—cost twice as much per pupil to run as their larger schools: £2,000 per child a year against £1,000 a year in schools with 200 pupils. Norfolk has more than 100 primary schools with up to 60 pupils on roll, so the cost of maintaining them will be significant. The authority would be failing in its duty to its charge payers if it did not look at ways of reducing costs by, for example, amalgamating some of those schools or clustering them in the way that my hon. Friend helpfully suggested.

It is also possible to look at the situation in another way. For every additional pound spent on maintaining an expensive small school, there will be a pound less spent on other, larger schools. Thus, those schools will be less well equipped, and their pupils less well served.

Small schools can also give rise to problems beyond those of cost. One of the most important factors in the learning process, especially for children of primary age, is the need to mix with others of their own age. Pupils learn not just from their teachers, or their parents, but from their peers, and it is an important part of the process of child development that children learn to mix with others of their own age, from different backgrounds and different environments. Such mixing also stimulates learning in the classroom. Brighter pupils encourage others to emulate their achievements. Debate in the classroom becomes livelier and ideas are sparked as each contributes in his or her own way. How much better it must be, in general, for a 10-year-old to develop in a class of, say, 20 or 30 other 10-year-olds than in a varied age group, in which he or she may be one of only two or three 10-year-olds.

Many of the smaller primary schools in rural areas such as Norfolk were built 100 or more years ago, and have now reached a stage at which, necessarily, the education

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authority will sooner or later be faced with the question whether to modernise them—not least to meet the needs of the national curriculum to which my hon. Friend referred—or to close them.

We are bound to ask whether we can afford to modernise all the small rural primary schools. They are already costing much more than larger schools and they are likely, in many cases, to be lacking in terms of the education they can provide compared with larger schools. Because of their considerable age, they are likely to be relatively expensive to modernise.

On top of that, we have to query the justification for keeping some schools open when there are empty places in other nearby schools. Norfolk is not alone in having many thousands of unoccupied school places. Even accepting that it is not always practicable to remove all surplus places in a county, the issue clearly needs regular review. I congratulate Norfolk on its commitment to keeping its surplus places under regular review.

So much for the adverse aspects of small primary schools. I shall now look at some of the positive factors, most of which my hon. Friend has already highlighted. Perhaps the most important plus is the wider role which the smaller primary school typically plays in the local community. The village school is not just the place where children go to learn to read and write, or to add and subtract. It is, like other important institutions—the village church and the village pub—a place in which people come together, in which is fostered that community spirit which is the envy of all who live in large towns and cities. It is no accident that serious misbehaviour is almost unknown in small rural schools, and that truancy is almost non-existent. Traditional school events such as the Christmas play, the annual sports day and the harvest festival, mean so much more in a rural setting, and it is easy to see why those lucky enough to live in such communities often fight to retain their schools when they are under threat of closure.

That brings me directly to the two schools about which my hon. Friend spoke, the first of which is Harpley controlled primary school near King's Lynn. I confirm our understanding that the education authority, following considerable parental opposition to the possibility of that school closing, has now decided on a partial reprieve and has agreed to fill the vacant headship for three years, after which I understand the school's future will be subject to review.

Perhaps I should not add to what my hon. Friend said about Syderstone school. His appeal was not to me but to the county council to consider carefully before disposing of the buildings following the decision taken last year.

It is undoubtedly true that in small schools children are likely to receive more individual attention than they could hope to obtain in larger schools. This ought to benefit pupils at both the top and bottom of the ability spectrum and, with a wide age range, teachers can frequently match their input much more closely to individual needs.

Many small schools also benefit from the kind of clustering arrangements to which my hon. Friend referred, which help to make up for some of the deficiencies which might otherwise prevail. We recognised, long before the Education Reform Act 1988 and the national curriculum, that small rural primary schools had real difficulties in providing a rich curriculum experience for their children, that they suffered from being isolated, and that teachers and head teachers all too often had little opportunity to compare notes. That is why we launched the rural schools education support grant programme, the benefits of which are now widely seen in counties such as Norfolk, which took part in the programme, and where so much has been done to overcome the inherent problems faced by small rural primary schools.

My hon. Friend asked what had happened to that programme. It was, of course, a pump-priming programme, as are so many of the activities under the education support grant. The recently published report by the research team from the university of Leicester, which we asked to evaluate the rural schools programme, shows quite clearly that it is possible for many small schools to cope with the national curriculum and to provide a full and varied curriculum for their pupils. I shall let my hon. Friend have a copy of that report.

My hon. Friend mentioned local management of schools. Norfolk certainly seems to appreciate the value of its small schools because it altered its local management scheme in two ways earlier this year, both to the benefit of small schools. First, it amended the formula to provide greater protection for schools with fewer than eight teachers. Secondly, it amended the age-weighted pupil unit, on which funding is largely based, to allocate proportionately more resources to younger pupils. To my mind, that is an intelligent use of the scope that is available under the local management of schools system.

It is clear, therefore, that there are many factors that have to be taken into account when considering whether a particular small school is doing a good job, whether it should be closed or amalgamated, whether it should be modernised and whether it should continue to be supported, albeit at relatively high cost. The important feature is that each case must be considered on its individual merits.

My hon. Friend referred to Norfolk's capital allocation. I was able to increase the part of the annual capital guideline that refers to schools alone from £2·3 million in the current year to £2·8 million in the year beginning in April. Together with the additional resources that my hon. Friend told me about, which were realised last year and which I hope can be realised next year, Norfolk should be able to continue to tackle any outstanding backlog.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this issue. I have carefully noted all the the other points that he has made and I shall certainly ensure that they are taken fully into account in any consideration of the future of small primary schools in north-west Norfolk that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State may be called upon to undertake in future.

Finally, I assure my hon. Friend and his constituents—indeed, all those who live in rural communities—that the Government are as concerned as he is to see the quality of rural life safeguarded and enhanced. As William Cowper pointed out,

"God made the country, and man made the town."

There can be no better reason for wanting to maintain and enhance the quality of rural life.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-four minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 19 February 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

ABERDEEN HARBOUR ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Mr. Secretary Lang presented a Bill to confirm a Provisional Order under section 7 of the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, relating to Strathclyde Regional Council: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be considered on Tuesday next and to be printed. [Bill 83.]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Domestic Rates

1. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has had on the subject of domestic rates; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): I receive very few such representations. The overwhelming majority of taxpayers have no wish to see the reintroduction of unfair domestic rates.

Mr. Butler: Does my hon. Friend agree that domestic rates were especially unfair to single people, and will he reassure the House that he, at least, has no intention of returning to a system that discriminated against many pensioners?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is right. It is extraordinary that the Labour party is planning that widows, for example, should enjoy no discount over households full of wage earners. It is incredible that the Labour party proposes that there should be no limit on the tax that a widow would pay on the house in which she has lived all her life. It is incredible also that the Labour party proposes for a widow four different intrusive valuations of her house, and proposes, too, that that same widow should be penalised with higher taxation if she has made improvements to her property. That is Labour party policy, and I shall have nothing to do with it.

Mr. John Evans: Does the Minister acknowledge that when we had a domestic rating system almost every citizen in the land made sure that he or she registered to vote? Will he now confirm that one side effect of the appalling poll tax is that more than a million citizens of this country have not registered to vote? Will he mount a campaign to ensure that every citizen in the land registers for a vote—especially so that those votes can be cast in the general election?

Mr. Portillo: I know that the Labour party thinks that it has lost the election, and is looking for an excuse. That is what is known as a pre-emptive whinge. If anybody has given up his right to vote, in the misguided intention of not paying his taxes, he will get no sympathy from the public—and more fool he, for listening to the Labour Members of Parliament who urged people not to pay their community charge.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: Is my hon. Friend aware that in my constituency the majority of people infinitely prefer the council tax to Labour's alternative—the so-called fair rates, which are nothing but a return to the dreaded rating system that we had before, and which was especially hated in the south of England?

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend's constituents were often paying £2,000 on their houses, whether or not they could afford it, and whether or not they were widows or pensioners. Who could possibly advocate returning to such an unfair system? Labour is the only party which could advocate that.

Mr. Alton: If fairness is to be the criterion, does the Minister agree that it is fundamentally unjust that people should be expected to pay twice—that people should be surcharged in cities such as Liverpool, where last year the cost was £71 per head, after people had already paid their bills? Next year it could cost £2 extra a week—£100 per head—to pay for people who have refused to pay their poll tax? Does the Minister agree that that—and the practice of sending vexatious summonses to people who have paid their bills, and who are being forced to pay £12 a head for the privilege of receiving such a summons—must be altered if people are to have any confidence in the system?

Mr. Portillo: It is terrible that people are being made to pay for the non-payers. That is why there will be no amnesty, and those people will be pursued until the moment that they pay up. It is surprising that some people in Liverpool chose not to pay their community charge, when they were urged not to do so by Labour Members of Parliament? One Member of Parliament there was actually sent to prison for non-payment. Is it any surprise that some people took that example and ran up horrendous debts? There will still be no amnesty.

Rents-to-Mortgages

2. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to make an announcement on a national scheme for the conversion of council rents to mortgages.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Sir George Young): My right hon. Friend is considering a statutory rents-to-mortgages scheme in the light of the results of the pilot schemes in Basildon and Milton Keynes.

Mrs. Hicks: Is my hon. Friend aware that since 1980, 10,075 council tenants in Wolverhampton have become the proud owners of their council houses? Does he recognise that many people want to be proud owners, but cannot afford to buy their council homes outright? They would warmly welcome the opportunity, which they hope

that the Government will give them, of being able to convert their rents to mortgages. I ask my hon. Friend, please, to give us that opportunity as soon as possible. When he does so, I hope that he will ensure that he legislates to ensure that Labour cannot operate delaying tactics as they have in Wolverhampton. Labour does not want people to own their own homes.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend rightly draws attention to her many constituents who are now home owners and thus have the privilege of owning their own homes—a right which would have been denied them if we had listened to the advice of Opposition Members. If we decide to extend the rents-to-mortgages scheme and to make it nationwide, we shall take steps to ensure that no recalcitrant local authority can deny people rights that have been given to them by the House.

Mr. Winnick: Is the Minister aware that a number of people in the west midlands and elsewhere who took the opportunity of buying their accommodation now find that their homes have been repossessed as a direct result of Government economic policy? The essential need in housing is to provide far more rented accommodation. Before the Minister gives us, once again, the sterile old argument about the number of empty council properties, I point out that the number of empty council properties is far fewer than the number of empty properties owned by the Government.

Sir George Young: No one in temporary accommodation who sees empty and unused local authority accommodation thinks that that is a sterile argument. On the first point, local authority tenants who bought their homes are among those least likely to have been repossessed. They tend to be people who are used to making regular weekly payments and they have a substantial equity in their homes because of discounts. They are not a significant element among those who have been repossessed. We shall continue to put pressure on local authorities with stock that has been empty for more than a year. We shall persuade them to bring it back into use for the benefit of those in temporary accommodation.

Mr. Hind: My hon. Friend will be aware that I have often urged him to follow the Basildon project with the Skelmersdale project. Skelmersdale is a new town with many former council houses which would be ideal for conversion from rents to mortgages. When he considers his share of the Conservative party manifesto, will my hon. Friend give a promise to my Skelmersdale council tenants that they will be able to purchase their houses under such a scheme in the future?

Sir George Young: We are, indeed, reflecting on precisely that proposition. We believe that the tenants about whom my hon. Friend has spoken are responsible people who are capable of taking a mature decision. I was appalled to see that the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) referred to the rents-to-mortgage scheme as a "facile and short-term measure". That is a patronising approach which would deny widening choice to many local authority tenants.

Mr. Soley: Is not the reality that the scheme is an enormous flop? Is not it true that throughout the United Kingdom, only about 100 such cases have been pursued despite the enormous amount which the Government have put into advocating the scheme? Is not the reality that there is a far greater interest at present in a mortgages-to-rents scheme? Does the Minister agree with the figure given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the Dispatch Box when he told us that there would be 40,000 mortgage rescues this year? If the Minister does not agree with that figure, will he tell us how long it will take to introduce any rescue schemes? Are we talking about months or years?

Sir George Young: As to the rents-to-mortgages scheme, 568 people in Milton Keynes and Basildon applied to buy their home under the scheme; and 100 applicants have switched to the right-to-buy scheme. They would not share the hon. Gentleman's view. Labour adopts a dogmatic approach to the rents-to-mortgages scheme, as it did to the right to buy and will abandon it in the same way.

Mr. Dunn: Does my hon. Friend accept my view that the Labour party would really like tied workers living in tied cottages? Will he confirm that tenants who decide to buy under the provisions of the rents-to-mortgages scheme will pay little more than they do in rent?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right. They would pay exactly the same under the rents-to-mortgages scheme as they currently pay in rent—but they would be acquiring their homes, rather than simply being tenants. I could do no better than use the graphic terms in which my hon. Friend described Labour's position. It has a paternalistic approach to local authority tenants. We seek to enfranchise them.

Environmental Protection Act 1990

4. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress being made in implementing the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Trippier): The Environmental Protection Act 1990 has already led to significant improvements in national pollution control, waste disposal, the control of litter and the reorganisation of bodies responsible for the countryside. Progress in all areas is continuing on schedule.

Mr. Williams: Will the Minister confirm that Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has so far achieved just six prosecutions under integrated pollution control and the 1990 Act? The Minister will remember that in Committee, he regularly boasted about how powerful a piece of legislation the Bill was—saying that it was the most far-reaching legislation in Europe, and so on. After 13 years of Conservative government, it is the only environment Act that we have. It is flimsy legislation. No money was committed to it, only six prosecutions have been brought and fines imposed to date amount to only £13,000. Is not that the true measure of the Act and of the Government's lack of commitment to the environment?

Mr. Trippier: When the hon. Gentleman sat on the Standing Committee on the Bill he did not vote on any single occasion against the precise measures to which he now refers. There is a major difference between the hon. Gentleman and myself as to whether prosecutions are an

agency's proof of success. I maintain that the principal force of the 1990 Act is the deterrents that it introduced. Prosecutions are the mark of the failure of a policy, not of its success. The hon. Gentleman has a ghoulish thirst for blood—except, of course, the sight of his own.

Mr. Squire: Is not my hon. Friend a little surprised that the Opposition seek to raise that point, given that the 1990 Act and other measures demonstrate that every major environmental initiative this century has been implemented by a Conservative Government? Will my hon. Friend emphasise that Labour's only policy on air pollution is to abolish nuclear power and replace it with coal-fired power —the net consequence of which could be only a massive increase in global warming?

Mr. Trippier: My hon. Friend is right. On his last point, Labour has manifestly failed to square the circle. While it has a policy such as that to which my hon. Friend referred, it cannot convince the House or anyone else that it is serious about stabilising and reducing carbon dioxide levels. My hon. Friend's first point is valid. Conservative Governments have been responsible for all major environmental legislation. An Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), said at Labour's party conference that Labour introduced the Clean Air Act 1956. It did not. That legislation was introduced by a Conservative Government.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Will the Minister explain why, if the Environmental Protection Act 1990 is so wonderful, the Government are being dragged to the European Court for failing to comply with Community legislation on water standards and air pollution control? Is it not a fact that, for all their fine words, the Government's deeds are desperately poor and that the country is looking forward to a change of Government in a month?

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman always comes to the House badly briefed. Nothing in the Environmental Protection Act 1990 relates to the European directives to which his question refers. Every member state has either received article 169 letters or is, according to the Commission, in breach of European directives. The case being considered during the next few weeks will be the first alleged breach of an environment directive by this Government in 20 years' membership of the European Community—and I am proud of that.

Empty Council Properties

5. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest figure for the number of council properties left empty by the 10 councils with the most such properties.

Sir George Young: In the latest housing investment programme returns, the 10 councils reporting the highest percentage of their council house stock empty on 1 April 1991 were Liverpool—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]—with 5,733 dwellings; Manchester—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]—with 6,042; Salford—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]—with 2,292; Burnley, 372; Brent—[HON. MEMBERS: "Tory."]—937, but Brent has no overall control; Hackney, 1,998; Tower Hamlets, 1,895; Knowsley, 1,037; Newcastle upon Tyne, 1,886; and Wolverhampton, 1,347.

Mr. Evans: I thank my hon. Friend for those revealing figures, and congratulate him on all his efforts to rehouse the homeless. Is that not in stark contrast to Labour Members who trade on the squalor and misery of people who are not housed? Their friends in the town halls keep people out of homes and use them to trade and to get cheap votes. When will the Opposition tell Labour councils to open those houses, and get the homeless off the streets and into the empty dwellings that those Labour authorities control?

Sir George Young: There is——*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Could hon. Members calm down.

Sir George Young: There is no way in which I can match my hon. Friend's colourful eloquence. He rightly points out that—apart from Brent, which has no overall control, and Tower Hamlets, which is controlled by the Liberal Democrats—the 10 authorities with the highest percentage of empties in their stock are Labour controlled, and about 20,000 properties have been left empty for more than a year. That is an affront to people in temporary accommodation and in housing stress. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to that. We must reflect on whether further measures might be needed to put extra pressure on authorities to bring properties back into use.

Mr. Tony Banks: Instead of trying to score cheap points *—[Interruption.]*—no hon. Member would defend any situation where empty properties are kept unnecessarily empty. We know the Minister to be a reasonable man. Why does he not call in the authorities that he mentioned —there are others—to identify the problems that confront them and which lead to properties being left empty when clearly, a large number of people are waiting to be housed?

Sir George Young: We are not after cheap points, but cheap accommodation. The hon. Gentleman knows that many local authorities could use quicker reletting procedures and faster procedures for the repair and maintenance of properties to reduce the gap between one tenant leaving and another moving in.

The Audit Commission has said that if all authorities did as well as the average, significant reductions could be made in the number of families living in temporary accommodation. Many of the voids are in that category not because of a shortage of resources, but because of weak and poor management. I hope that Opposition Members will use their influence with Labour-controlled councils to improve their performance and so put many more such properties back into use.

Mrs. Gorman: Is my hon. Friend aware of the disgraceful record of Basildon council, which covers part of my constituency, on reletting properties? Is he further aware of the bribe that that council is offering to its tenants in the form of a rent freeze to try to dissuade them from opting for new landlords in Commission for New Towns and council house properties? Will he assure me that he will look into that matter, because Basildon council is simply trying to bribe its tenants before the election?

Sir George Young: I am sure that the residents of Basildon will see straight through any transparent attempt to buy their votes. Many local authorities, including Basildon, could do better. As I have already said, we will

see whether any further measures are necessary to reduce the number of properties left empty by local authorities. It is a scandal.

Mr. George Howarth: When will the Minister own up to the fact that the biggest offender in terms of empty property is his Government, who have 31,000 empty properties throughout the country? Instead of all this fake indignation, when will he own up to the fact that most of the local authorities, including my own of Knowsley, have empty properties because they are being held for improvement under schemes in which the Government are involved after 13 years in which they have neglected to fund local authority and other housing stock? When will the Minister admit that it is him and his Government who are responsible for all the problems, including the appalling homelessness that is subsequently caused?

Sir George Young: Most Government property is owned by the Ministry of Defence which is bringing back families from Germany and other parts of the world and those properties are needed for them. There is no way in which one can compare properties built by the MOD for service men with the scandalous performance of a number of local authorities. Such comparison cannot justify that performance—nothing can justify leaving 20,000 properties empty for more than a year. There is no advantage to be gained by Opposition Members seeking to defend the indefensible.

Council House Sales

6. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the availability of council house sales' receipts to repay debt and to provide additional houses to rent.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): At 1 April 1991, local authorities had unspent housing capital receipts of £700 million. In addition they held approximately £5·1 billion from all capital receipts and set-aside as provision for debt repayment under the new capital finance system. Since 1985-86 alone, total capital public expenditure on social housing provision has been £18·3 billion.

Mr. Bruce: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. I wonder whether a new radical approach should be taken to the receipts from council house sales. Should councils be asked to relieve the public sector borrowing requirement of that burden of long-term debt by transferring it and their balances to housing associations? In that way housing associations could immediately buy up many of the surplus properties that are currently available on the housing market. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that would provide low-cost homes, a welcome boost to the housing market and reduce housing benefits?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend's heart is in the right place, but I do not believe that his precise proposal would have the effect that he has in mind. Because of the flow of capital receipts we have been able to increase the cash spent on social housing, not least through the agency to which my hon. Friend referred, the Housing Corporation, whose budget is shortly to rise to £2 billion a year.

Mr. Nellist: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that if the principle that the Government applied in cancelling £14·5 billion worth of debt for all nationalised industries before privatisation were applied to local authorities, there would be little debt left to repay? If he is really concerned to increase the number of homes available to rent, why will he not recognise that of the 700,000 empty properties, 100,000 are in the council sector and 600,000 are privately owned? Why not deal with the beam instead of for ever going on about the mote?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman raises the important issue of the privately rented sector. It is probably true to say that his party did more decade after decade to destroy the availability of properties in the private rented sector—to the impoverishment of some of the most needy sectors of society.

Area Cost Adjustment

7. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider the abolition of the area cost adjustment.

Mr. Portillo: It is important that standard spending assessments should recognise that pay and the costs of recruiting and retaining staff are substantially higher in some areas than in others. That is the purpose of the area cost adjustment.

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend will be aware that there is much disquiet in Warwickshire and elsewhere about the standard spending assessment and the result of the revenue support grant—*[Interruption.]* At least I get support on some occasions from Labour Members. The area cost adjustment exacerbates that position. My hon. Friend will also be aware that a number of counties are now calling for the abolition of the area cost adjustment. Will he give careful consideration to the possibility of abolishing that unneeded and unnecessary measure?

Mr. Portillo: I do not think it would be reasonable to pretend that the cost of paying people, recruiting them and retaining them is the same in the south-east as in other parts of the United Kingdom. It would be unfair to pretend that, but I do not want my hon. Friend to be carried away by the importance of it. In a county such as Hampshire, recognising the extra costs, we give an extra 5 per cent. for teachers' pay, so the differential between Hampshire and my hon. Friend's county is only 5 per cent.

Mr. Flynn: A consequence of the area cost adjustment is to elevate finance to be the supreme consideration. Is the Minister aware that part of the result is that in my constituency today 14 classrooms have been closed in Bassaleg school? Parents were told last night that their children should not come to school due to the appalling standard of cleanliness resulting from the employment of contract cleaners. That state of affairs never occurred under the previous system. What do the Government intend to do about it?

Mr. Portillo: Not only have we enormously increased the standard to which schools and public buildings are cleaned, as a result of compulsory competitive tendering, but we have saved ratepayers and community charge payers huge amounts of money. It is disgraceful that the Labour party, in hock to the trade unions, is now

threatening to sweep away compulsory competitive tendering, irrespective of the cost and the effect on services to the customer.

Noise Pollution

8. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will bring forward further measures to assist the police, local authorities and individuals in combating noise pollution.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): My Department commissioned an independent review of noise control policy in 1990 and has already taken action on more than half the recommendations.

Mr. Bowis: Does my hon. Friend agree that a curse of modern urban living is musical mega-decibels in the night? Hitherto, police and local authorities thought that they did not have power to deal with it adequately. Now that it has been shown in Liverpool that there are powers to confiscate offending equipment—as there always have been in Scotland—may I ask my hon. Friend to draw those powers to the attention of local authorities—and, through the Home Office, the police—so that the public may be protected from this menace?

Mr. Baldry: There has been considerable comment in recent months about the need for environmental health officers to have power temporarily to remove equipment. We have advised environmental health officers that they already have power under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 temporarily to remove equipment such as audio equipment to ensure that a noise abatement notice is complied with. The courts have recently demonstrated the existence and effectiveness of that power. Any environmental health officer who is in doubt about the existence of that power should examine schedule 3 to the 1990 Act, where it is clearly set out.

Mr. Haynes: Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we had a Greater London Council, the noise of lorries in London was controlled. Is the Minister aware that when I lie in my flat at night I cannot sleep for noise? I need to be fit so that I can stay awake in that Committee upstairs. Will the Minister do something about it?

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman is conversant with the problem of noise pollution in every way. He will be glad to know that we have set up a noise review working party and that one of the issues that it has been considering is traffic noise and how to deal with it more effectively.

Diesel Fuel

9. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he proposes to take to encourage the use of low-sulphur diesel fuel.

Mr. Baldry: The Government welcome the European Commission's draft directive setting new limits for the sulphur content of diesel fuel and other gasoil. Those are a necessary complement to last year's directive on emission standards for heavy duty diesel vehicles. We are working for resolution of outstanding points of technical detail with a view to early adoption by the Council of Ministers.

Mr. King: My hon. Friend will know of the widespread success of his unleaded petrol campaign, which has persuaded motorists to use a more environmentally acceptable fuel. Is he aware that 10 per cent. of cars purchased these days run on diesel, and that there is widespread concern that the fuel used has a heavy sulphur content? The European Commission wants that content to be reduced to a very small amount by 1995-96. Will my hon. Friend speak to our right hon. Friend the Chancellor about introducing financial incentives similar to those for unleaded fuel so as to encourage speedier acceptance of a lower-sulphur fuel?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The fiscal incentives for use of unleaded petrol have been a great success. As my hon. Friend knows, fiscal matters are for our right hon. Friend the Chancellor. However, my hon. Friend's suggestion envisages simultaneous availability on the market of two different grades of diesel, which would present difficulties in terms of separate pumps, separate distribution systems, and so on. Moreover, it would soon become redundant when the low sulphur standard becomes mandatory for all diesel. We are seeking to resolve a similar difficulty with the Commission's proposals.

Mr. Dalyell: In view of the sulphur monoxide consequencies, have the Government taken into account the latest findings from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in relation to the ozone layer, and the need for urgent measures to be taken into account in view of this desperately dangerous and cancer-giving situation?

Mr. Baldry: The Government have been at the forefront in calling on our European partners to take action to reduce chlorofluorocarbons by 1995. My hon. Friend the Minister of State will no doubt have something to say about that to European Community colleagues this weekend.

Mr. Paice: Will my hon. Friend look at the work being done in Austria and France to make an eco-friendly diesel fuel from oilseed rape and other oil crops? Will he particularly look at what the French are doing in terms of tax concessions to encourage the viability of such an environmentally friendly fuel, and will he perhaps have a word with our right hon. Friend the Chancellor on that subject?

Mr. Baldry: In that area, as in so many, enhancing environmental improvements will mean considerable scope for new environmental technology. The good example that my hon. Friend gives shows that, in pursuit of higher environmental standards, new technology is coming forward. I shall certainly look with interest at the specific matters to which my hon. Friend has drawn attention.

Mr. Simon Hughes: What is the Government's general policy in relation to fuel and environmental protection? Given that the chairman of the Conservative party and the Secretary of State for Energy have accepted, on behalf of the Conservative party, that petrol prices will have to rise, do the Government wish to take action before Europe imposes its own regime on us, or will they wait for Europe? What increases in fuel prices does the Conservative party envisage in the next 10 years?

Mr. Baldry: It is a great pity that not one member of the Liberal Democratic party could be bothered to attend the European Standing Committee this morning, where we debated those matters for nearly two and a half hours. Had they bothered to look in on that Standing Committee, they would have heard me make it clear that the Government will be working in co-operation with our European Community colleagues to find a way of reducing carbon dioxide emissions effectively. We have said that we recognise that high energy prices may have to play a part in a strategy for reducing carbon dioxide emissions. It is important, however, to recognise that this is a global problem which requires a global solution. Perversely, unilateral action, even by the European Community, could have the effect of increasing carbon dioxide emissions.

Air Quality

10. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action is being taken by his Department to monitor air quality in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: My Department already spends more than £4 million annually on monitoring air quality, particularly in London, and making the information available to the general public and the media. We are extending the range and coverage of our urban air quality monitoring network in the coming years, and an additional monitoring site came into operation in central London last month.

Mr. Corbyn: Is the Minister aware that many people in London are deeply disturbed by the increasing incidence of asthma among children, but that the Minister for Health has been unable to give figures relating to the level of asthma suffering in London as a result of air pollution, which is caused mainly by vehicles? In December, air quality levels were the worst for 11 years, with carbon monoxide at 13·3 parts per million, and nitrogen dioxide at 243 parts per billion? Does he agree that the serious deterioration of air quality in London arises mainly from increasing vehicle movements and that the best course would therefore be to improve public transport, reduce the number of cars going through London and ensure cleaner fuels and cleaner burn to preserve the health of our children, who are suffering grievously because of the increasing levels of pollution in central London?

Mr. Trippier: No one has a monopoly of concern about this issue. Neither is the problem confined to London. As two members of my family suffer quite badly from asthma —they suffered particularly when we had low-level ozone problems last summer—I am well aware of the situation. I can give the hon. Gentleman and the House some comfort by saying that over the next two years things will change dramatically. By the end of this year, the fitting of catalysts to new cars will be mandatory. Then there are the new European Community standards for heavy diesel vehicles. The new MOT exhaust emissions test, which was introduced only a few months ago, will also play a significant part in cleaning up the air. In addition, there are traffic management measures, including red routes, of which the hon. Gentleman is aware. The Environmental Protection Act 1990, too, has raised the standards of air pollution control. The combination of those measures will improve the situation dramatically.

Mr. Jessel: Is not aircraft noise the worst form of air pollution in London? Does the Minister agree that, as the Government have curbed night flights, refused planning permission for a heliport at Cannon Street in the City, stopped the Heathrow-Gatwick helicopter link and refused planning permission for a fifth terminal at Heathrow, they are second to none in protecting people from the blight and the curse of aircraft noise?

Mr. Trippier: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that matter. I add only that a consultation paper on aircraft noise, including the noise caused by leisure flying, has been released. That paper is the responsibility of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, and I have no doubt that when it has gone out we shall receive positive comments and shall act accordingly.

Rev. Martin Smyth: We welcome the positive steps that the Minister says have been taken, and we are glad to hear of the amount of money being spent on monitoring. What specific lessons have been learnt which could result in a reduction of air pollution? I am thinking, for example, of the city of Belfast and other urban areas throughout Northern Ireland which in the past year have suffered more than ever from air pollution.

Mr. Trippier: The most important outcome of the increased use of monitoring equipment is that people who suffer from respiratory diseases can be alerted to the possibility of a problem arising within the following 24 hours. I have already indicated that, as members of my family suffer from asthma, I am aware that it is absolutely essential to have such information. The advice provided by the Department of Health is very good. The Department advises people who suffer from respiratory diseases to take minimum exercise and, preferably, to stay indoors. That is the purpose of the monitoring equipment. We have learnt that when there is protracted sunlight during the summer months the low-level ozone problem is activated and aggravated, causing massive difficulty for those who suffer from respiratory diseases. All the measures that I catalogued earlier will help to reduce vehicle emissions —the principal cause of bad air.

Green Belts

11. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider the need for additional regulations to enhance the ecological protection of the environment for green belt areas of open space in the outer London boroughs.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): We will shortly issue a draft planning policy guidance note on nature conservation which will expand and update our existing policies to promote nature conservation in all areas, including the green belts.

Mr. Dykes: I thank my hon. Friend for being part of the Government who have enhanced and protected green belt districts more robustly than any other Government of the post-war period. I believe that total green belt space has doubled since 1979. I particularly thank my hon. Friend

and his colleagues for recently calling in the Hillside and Brookshill development in my district so as to protect still further the local green belt land. Is my hon. Friend aware that without fresh primary legislation it is possible to require owners of green belt land to ensure that it is maintained properly and not just left undeveloped?

Mr. Yeo: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to reinforce the Government's commitment to protect green belt districts. We have been robust in dealing with planning applications in green belt areas, and we are wholly committed to the five objectives of the green belt. As my hon. Friend said, we have substantially increased the area covered by green belt in this country, and I welcome this chance to make absolutely clear to any planning applicants thinking of trying to develop green belt land that we shall stand by our commitments.

English Heritage

12. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when county hall and Battersea power station were last inspected by English Heritage as his advisers on historic buildings matters.

Mr. Yeo: Both buildings were last inspected by English Heritage on Thursday 13 February.

Mr. Banks: How very convenient! Is it not disgraceful that two of London's most conspicuous and well-known landmarks—county hall and Battersea power station—stand empty, forlorn and in an increasingly derelict state? Does the Minister recall that a shyster developer was going to turn Battersea power station into a theme park? The building now stands in grave danger from the weather, derelict and in ruins. Is it not a fitting monument to 13 years of shyster Tory Government?

Mr. Yeo: The only thing that stands between county hall being put to good use is the Labour-controlled Lambeth borough council, which is squandering charge payers' money on increasingly desperate but unsuccessful attempts to prevent the sale of county hall and its productive use for hotel and residential accommodation. The consequence of those legal manoeuvres is to deny other London boroughs a massive capital receipt which could have been put to good use on behalf of charge payers. That attitude exposes the fact that Labour's posture on capital receipts is totally fraudulent. If the Labour party were in power, there would be no capital receipts. The hon. Gentleman's question was interesting in that it linked county hall and Battersea power station, making it clear that the Labour party's plans for a reborn Greater London council are not the reassuring slim-line version that Labour spokesmen have been peddling. The Labour party plans a vast and sprawling bureaucracy which will need not just county hall, but Battersea power station, to house the thousands of officials required to carry out the wishes of Labour's public sector trade union paymasters.

Mr. Bowis: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Member representing Battersea has kept in regular touch with English Heritage, from which he has received confirmation that everything that needs to be done to protect that building has been done? English Heritage pays tribute to the work of Wandsworth borough council in ensuring that, if the owner of the building has not done the work, the council has done it and billed the owner. Will my hon. Friend pay tribute to English Heritage and to Wandsworth council for protecting that building?

Mr. Yeo: First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) for his interest in the matter. It is true that English Heritage has carried out frequent monitoring. Both that institution and Wandsworth borough council have demonstrated their concern about the fabric of Battersea power station and have stepped in from time to time to ensure that, while the present owner obtains the refinancing required, essential works are carried out to prevent the building's condition from deteriorating. The excellent work by Wandsworth borough council and by my hon. Friend will be rewarded, as the key to the increased majority in Parliament that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will secure later this year lies in the fact that many London Labour-held marginals will fall as a result of the lingering effect of the loony London Labour party.

Mr. Gould: How can the Minister justify the attempt to sell off into the private sector, just a matter of weeks before a general election, what most Londoners rightly regard as the proper seat of London's government? Is that not merely a last act of spite by a Government who still bear a grudge against London? Will the Minister tell us whether he agrees with the chairman of the Tory party that a citywide administration is needed for London? If he does agree, what form should it take?

Mr. Yeo: The verdict of Londoners on whether London wants a Labour-led Greater London council reborn will be seen when we judge the results of the general election in the London constituencies. I am confident that those results will pass a crystal clear judgment that people are afraid of the Labour party in London. They can see what it is like in Lambeth, in Southwark, in Hackney and elsewhere. They will further pass judgment that the Government want to see that enormous capital asset across the river sold for hotel or residential accommodation, and a huge capital receipt—probably more than £100 million—distributed to the old London boroughs for productive use in their areas. If the Labour party continues to promote the idea that London wants a new Greater London authority, with powers over the police—a policy which strikes terror into the heart of every law-abiding citizen in the capital—it will get its come-uppance when the general election comes.

Housing Associations

13. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress in developing the role of housing associations.

Sir George Young: Housing associations are now the main providers of new subsidised housing. Government support for the Housing Corporation's approved development programme is set to increase from £1·6 billion this year to more than £2 billion in 1993-94. Next year, the corporation will approve more than 50,000 new homes—more than 25 per cent. more than this year and three times as many as in 1990-91.

Mr. Nicholson: I am grateful for the progress indicated in that reply. My hon. Friend knows of my great interest in further improving the resources available for housing associations. Will my hon. Friend—with his hon. Friend

the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, with whom I have corresponded on the matter—undertake to consider further how a housing association might help with the difficult and complex problem faced by owner-occupiers in Galmington in Taunton, whose homes were built in a non-traditional manner just after the war and who cannot now sell those homes? As the owners are aging, they are facing considerable problems.

Sir George Young: I am distressed to hear of the problems facing owner-occupiers in the area referred to by my hon. Friend. The housing defects legislation was introduced to try to tackle those problems. I shall see whether further steps can be taken to remove the uncertaintly hanging over my hon. Friend's constituents.

Mr. Trimble: One welcomes the provision that housing associations can make, and I speak as a member of the management committee of a housing association. Nevertheless, one has one reservation about making housing associations the main vehicle for the provision of social housing: a housing association is not accountable in the same way as a local authority to the people for whom it is making the provision—that is, of course, in those areas where local authorities have a housing function.

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman raises a serious matter. In England, we have been taking steps through the Housing Corporation to increase the accountability of housing associations to their tenants by, for example, promoting tenant membership of management committees, and by requiring management committees to consult much more effectively. One could develop the argument that a well-run housing association, with tenants on the board and with regular consultation, might be more accountable than a local authority for which there was a vote only every four years and which tended to ignore the views of tenants.

Mr. Wolfson: I support strongly the development of housing associations in view of my experience with my local authority in Sevenoaks, which successfully sold the whole of its housing stock to West Kent housing association. Nevertheless, is my hon. Friend the Minister not concerned about the growth in size of housing associations, which might make it more difficult to maintain the personal contact with tenants which is an important aspect of good housing management?

Sir George Young: Again, my hon. Friend raises a very valid point. The housing association movement has a tradition of accountability and good local performance. If a housing association becomes too big, it loses those inbuilt advantages. Of course we have this matter under review. The Housing Corporation is particularly anxious to ensure that the smaller and medium-sized housing associations get an adequate share of the growing resources provided by the Housing Corporation so that the more traditional associations can continue to provide the new homes and local management to which my hon. Friend paid tribute.

Mr. O'Brien: The Minister must be aware of the shortage of affordable housing in villages and towns in rural areas, with the result that young people have to leave those areas to find suitable accommodation. The Housing Corporation cannot meet the demand in the rural areas. What is the Minister doing about that? Will he consider allowing local authorities to build houses in rural areas for the people who live there and who need the houses now?

Sir George Young: The Government have taken a number of steps to promote the provision of affordable homes for exactly the people whom the hon. Gentleman mentions. We have two sets of rural initiatives—one through the Housing Corporation and one through local authorities. Increasingly, however, we are using the planning system to generate the affordable homes that are needed.

The hon. Gentleman will have read and re-read circular 7/91 which contains the exceptions policy, allowing homes to be provided on sites not normally designated as residential so long as they are aimed at local people. He will also be aware that the planning system can now be used to require a developer to make provision for a percentage of homes specifically for young people who cannot afford to buy on the open market. We are conscious of the issue and we have developed policies which address it head-on.

Community Charge

14. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which councils have the lowest level of community charge collection.

Mr. Portillo: For the first year of the community charge, I believe that the authorities with the lowest collection rates are Hackney, Islington, Lambeth, Liverpool, Newham, Southampton, Birmingham, Waltham Forest, Bristol and Greenwich. We have had no return from Manchester.

Mr. Arnold: Is not the most significant point about that list the fact that all the authorities listed are Labour controlled? Does my hon. Friend agree that that is not surprising, since so many Labour councillors backed the "won't pay, can't pay" campaign? As a result, there are large bills to be paid—bills which are being passed on to ordinary community charge payers. Is that fair?

Mr. Portillo: Of course it is not fair. The collection rate in my hon. Friend's area is 94 per cent., which shows that it can be done. There is a very strong link between the list that I have read out and the authorities whose councillors advocated non-payment—Lambeth, for instance, whose councillors were so bad that even the Labour party had to remove them from office. If the Labour party did not want us to vote for its councillors, what confidence can we have in the people that it puts up for election?

Another strong link is that the areas of inefficiency and non-collection are the very areas where the Conservatives have been scoring the most remarkable by-election victories in terms of council seats.

Mr. Blunkett: Does the Minister agree that the performance of Labour councils attempting to collect the uncollectable in the face of the unspeakable is responsible for this dilemma? A total of 172,000 people registered for poll tax payment in Lambeth, where 68,000 summonses and 50,000 liability orders have been issued. In Islington, 127,000 people registered, and there have been 75,000 summonses and a staggering 70,000 liability orders. Does the Minister agree that he and his colleagues are responsible, first, for refusing to take action to clear up the

fiasco on the issue of computer records being used, secondly for refusing to abolish the 20 per cent. contribution rule for the poorest in the community and, thirdly, for devising and implementing the wretched tax in the first place?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman is being preposterous. The figures that I read out are for the first year. The computer evidence problem has only just arisen. The condemnation of the figures that the hon. Gentleman has read out is that in those boroughs we need never have had so many liability orders or so many people taken to the courts or threatened with prison if they had not been misled by Labour Members of Parliament and councillors into running up enormous debts. Now that those people have run up those enormous debts, where are the Labour Members of Parliament who led them into that position? They have fled the field and left their constituents in the lurch.

Derbyshire County Council

15. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the numbers of people employed by Derbyshire county council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Staff employed by Derbyshire county council have increased by 22 per cent. in the past 10 years—from around 38,500 people in 1981 to nearly 47,000 people in 1991. If spending and the community charge are to be kept at acceptable levels, staff numbers have to be kept under better control than that.

Mr. Oppenheim: Is my hon. Friend aware that while Derbyshire county council's policies have led to the redundancies of hundreds of teachers recently, and while Derbyshire is the only county in England to have fewer policemen than 10 years ago, none the less the county council's job creation priorities have managed to find no fewer than three posts at £40,000 per annum for former Labour councillors and Members of Parliament, the council leader has fitted himself up with a job at an annual equivalent salary of £40,000, the leader of the Derbyshire Labour party—one David Skinner—has been given a job as a minder to Japanese business men despite being kicked out of the council for corruption 15 years ago, and his wife has been given a job at £23,000 per annum in the council's bloated publicity department? Are those the candy-floss, Mickey Mouse jobs that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) goes on about so much, or are those people just sponging off the backs of the poll tax payers?

Mr. Key: Anyone who wants to see a Labour government in action should look at Derbyshire. Talking of phoney jobs, the biggest generator of phoney jobs will be Labour's con trick of creating regional parliaments full of fully salaried Members of Parliament and all their hangers-on without making a ha'porth of difference to the quality of services for local people.

Mr. Skinner: That millionaire mammy's boy—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not wholly unparliamentary.

Mr. Skinner: That millionaire mammy's boy has some cheek to talk about families. My brother was sacked by a Tory council many years ago in Derbyshire because he had the guts to take it on, and he has nothing to apologise for. Neither has Derbyshire county council which, unlike many Tory councils, has kept school meal prices down to the lowest in Britain and refused to sack workers. In 1985, its Labour majority was bigger than that of the Tories and the people of Derbyshire re-elected it in 1989: they are satisfied with Derbyshire county council's policies, and when we have the general election they will kick out the Under-Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim), the man with the Pampers on.

Mr. Key: I think that we understand why so many Labour seats in Derbyshire are at risk in the coming election, and I am not surprised. This is the authority which has not increased school meal prices for 11 years, since 1981; it has been expelled from the Museums Association for selling pictures and using the money for non-museum purposes—and so on, and so on, and so on. The electorate will judge it.

Defence Equipment

3.32 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Alan Clark): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on a number of new equipment projects for the armed forces.

In my statement last week on amphibious forces, I said that a cornerstone of our policy in developing "smaller but better" armed forces was the enhancement of flexibility and mobility. For the Royal Air Force, one of the proven methods of achieving this—demonstrated both during the Falklands conflict and more recently in the liberation of Kuwait—is air-to-air refuelling. It became clear after the Falklands conflict that an increase in the RAF's tanker strength was vital, and a programme was set in train to augment and eventually replace the Victor tanker fleet. So far, nine VC10s and six Tristars have been added to the RAF tanker fleet, and a further 13 VC10 conversions are now in progress.

I am now pleased to announce that we have decided to award a contract to British Aerospace to give the remaining five VC10 transport aircraft a tanker capability. The work is expected to be done at BAe's Filton site, with significant elements sub-contracted to Flight Refuelling at Hurn.

The existing programme already provided the RAF with a capability in this area greater than that of any of our European allies. These additional aircraft will give the RAF the reach and flexibility that it needs to meet the challenges and uncertainties of the future.

The effectiveness of air power is determined not only by the performance of the aircraft but by their ability to defend themselves and suppress enemy air defences in a hostile environment. To those ends, we have decided to order a new defensive aids system for the Tornado F3 air defence variant, combining chaff and flares. Contract negotiations are under way with BAe, which, as prime contractor, will be responsible for system integration. The flare dispensers and system control equipment have been designed, and will be supplied, by Vinten Military Systems Ltd. of Bury St Edmunds.

Additionally, we intend to order from British Aerospace, subject to the agreement of satisfactory contract terms, a further batch of air-launched anti-radar missiles to replenish stocks expended during the Gulf war. Among the sub-contractors that will benefit from this order are Marconi Defence Systems of Portsmouth; Lucas Aerospace in Bradford; Irving of Letchworth; and Thorn EMI of Hayes.

The Gulf war also re-emphasised how essential good communications are to the success of military operations. We have decided to extend the successful Skynet 4 satellite communications programme. The three satellites currently in operation are expected to approach the end of their orbit life by 1997, and a further batch of new satellites will be ordered for launch in that year. That will extend the life of our current communications satellite system into the next century. A firm price project definition phase for Skynet 4, stage 2, will be conducted by the team responsible for the stage 1 satellites—British Aerospace Space Systems at Stevenage as prime contractor, with Matra Marconi Space at Portsmouth as the major sub-contractor.

We intend, subject to the agreement of acceptable contractual terms, to place a contract with Westland to convert the Royal Navy's Lynx mark 3 helicopter to the more capable mark 8 standard. The core of the Lynx mark 8 update will be a central tactical system, which has been developed by Racal Avionics in Raynes Park. The contract will provide for the conversion of seven airframes to the mark 8 standard, and the supply of tooling and modification kits to enable conversions of further aircraft to be undertaken by the Royal Navy.

The House will recall that we have been considering the purchase of additional Sea King for the search-and-rescue role. I am pleased to announce that we intend to order a further six Sea King helicopters and a Sea King simulator for the Royal Air Force. That will enable us to replace aging United Kingdom-based Wessex in the search-and-rescue role with this longer-range and generally more capable helicopter. In line with our policy of moving to tauter contractual conditions for non-competitive procurement, the contract with Westland for the helicopters will be subject to prior agreement of an acceptable firm price. Competitive tenders will be invited for the simulator.

Finally, I can confirm to the House our plans for further trainer aircraft for the Harrier force. Subject to the agreement of satisfactory contractual terms with British Aerospace, we intend to purchase 13 new Harrier T10 two-seater trainers for the RAF, and to convert five Harrier T4 aircraft to the more capable T8 standard for the Royal Navy.

The total value of these orders for the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy will be some £500 million. The proposals are within our existing defence expenditure plans, and provide yet further demonstration of the Government's firm commitment to ensuring that the armed forces, although smaller in overall numbers, will be better equipped than ever before.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): I know that the Minister will not think me churlish if I merely note that this is the second time in two weeks that some games have been played with defence statements. The Minister will recall that on the first occasion the title of the statement bore absolutely no relation to the content. Today, as late as 2 o'clock this afternoon, the Minister's office was prepared to say only that the equipment mentioned would be of an aerial nature. That would be perfectly acceptable were it not for the fact that I was able to discover an hour earlier from non-governmental sources exactly the type and amount of equipment which would be mentioned in the statement. It is a sad day when the Opposition have to run their own military intelligence in order to be able to respond to a statement.

As for the statement itself, we welcome the Government's long overdue steps on some of the issues, although we note that the timing is no coincidence because the Government have but three weeks to go. I note too the many areas which the statement fails to cover.

The replacement of the six elderly Wessex search-and-rescue helicopters is long overdue. Will the Minister confirm that what he has announced today is not an order but, if I read the statement correctly, an intention to order at some unspecified date in the future? When will he announce the replacement order for the other 44 Wessex helicopters and the 42 Puma helicopters, given the pressing need to make our armed forces more mobile?

The replacement orders for air-launched anti-radar missiles are also welcome and were anticipated as a result of the Gulf conflict. Why has the Minister taken so long to replace them, and does he intend also to replace all of the equipment used in the Gulf?

The announcement on Lynx helicopters is similarly welcome, but why did the Minister not provide this information when the issue was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) who asked him as far back as 23 May last year about plans to extend the life of the Lynx helicopters?

It was noticeable that, despite the fact that the Government wish to use the statement as an electoral weapon, all the announcements are for replacements. There are no new decisions and no new orders in any of the substantial and difficult areas. Has not the Government's continued dithering on the question of ASRAAM led to a withdrawal of our European partners and to a loss of interest by the United States? That has not only deprived British industry of much needed business but posed a threat to thousands of jobs in Bristol and Stevenage. It has also created uncertainty within the Royal Air Force itself about a replacement for Sidewinder. Why have the Government allowed that uncertainty to persist, and why have they taken so long to reach a decision? When do they intend to make an announcement on ASRAAM?

Will the Minister say what progress has been made on another substantial issue—the development of a stand-off runway denial weapon to replace the JP233 which was mentioned during the RAF debate? Have any studies been launched, and is any multinational collaboration envisaged?

What progress has been made on the substantial issue of the European fighter aircraft programme? Again, thousands of jobs in Warton, near Preston, are dependent on that decision. If the Government wish to use defence procurement as an electoral issue, we shall do likewise, because many decisions which they have refused to make affect thousands of jobs throughout the country, including those near Preston.

When will the Minister order the auxiliary oil replenishment vessel which will affect workers in Wallsend and Tynemouth?

Those questions must be answered. I am sure that the Minister will resist the temptation to produce a litany of lies about Labour's defence policy. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that he will avoid that temptation. Lest he be even tempted to do so, I repeat what my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan told the House on 14 October 1991. He said that the 1991 Labour party conference unanimously passed the following resolution:

"'The next Labour government will make a thorough assessment of the new and changing conditions and relationships in Europe, the Soviet Union and the wider world.'"—[*Official Report*, 14 October 1991; Vol. 196, c. 70.]

The next Labour Government will spend what is required properly to defend and ensure the security of the United Kingdom. As of today, that Labour Government is only eight weeks away.

Mr. Clark: I understand why the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) has very little to say—he wastes a lot of the House's time complaining about the niceties of the title of the statement. If he feels that he has been affronted in any way, I of course apologise.

It is interesting that the Labour party has now moved one stage further on from endorsing our programme, and is asking us why we took so long to reach a decision. I welcome that enthusiasm too, although I realise that every fresh endorsement given by the Opposition Front Bench further forecloses the options of the unfortunate right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), who will find that he is committed to high defence expenditure. As we all know, he will fall back on precisely what we have all been predicting—he will increase taxes. No matter how much he denies it, that is what he will do.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, North alleged that the statement concerned only replacement equipment. He cannot have been listening. The enhancement of the Skynet communication is new, as is the enhancement of the tanker and the flight refuelling equipment. The latter is unprecedented, and gives the Royal Air Force a greatly extended reach and capability. The purchase of Sea King, too, is new. It is a new aircraft, and it is very welcome.

I agree that ASRAAM is an important system, and a decision will be taken as soon as possible. I hope to make an announcement at some point in the future.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I had better say now that there is a heavy demand to speak in the subsequent debate—indeed, I shall have to impose a 10-minute limit. I shall allow questions on the statement to continue until 4.15. Then we have a ten-minute Bill, and then we shall move on to the main debate.

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): Is it not significant that the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) said not a word to congratulate my right hon. Friend on these important orders? Is that not revealing about the Labour party's attitude to orders for defence equipment?

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the equipment for Tornado to which he referred will be made at Warton —or, at least, in Lancashire? Will he also confirm that the Government are pressing ahead with their efforts to sell more military aircraft overseas, to which Labour Members are, at best, lukewarm, and to which many are downright hostile?

Mr. Clark: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend; he is right. I know that it is a source of embarrassment for the Labour party, which never welcomes good news, to hear of £500 million-worth of orders going to the defence industry. It has to find fault with such news and pick holes in it.

I confirm what my right hon. Friend said about the sourcing of the equipment for Tornado, with the exception of the chaff dispenser, which will be made by Bofors of Sweden.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I welcome the terms of the Minister's statement, especially in relation to the enhancement of the capability of the Tornado F3, two squadrons of which are stationed at RAF Leuchars, in my constituency. In the light of what the Minister said about helicopters, will he confirm that the Government do not intend to contractorise the military search-and-rescue capability? In particular, can he confirm that such a capability will be retained at RAF Leuchars, albeit using the Sea King rather than the Wessex, as he said in his statement?

Mr. Clark: Yes, I can confirm that we have no intention of contractorising search-and-air rescue. In any case, in combat conditions, in wartime, the military requirement would not effectively be subject to contractorisation.

The hon. Gentleman asked about Leuchars. No decision has yet been made on the basing of the aircraft; that is an entirely separate issue from their procurement.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Does my right hon. Friend recall the happy day that he and I spent at Flight Refuelling, in my constituency, some time ago? Will he accept not only the congratulations but the thanks of the management and work force of that company for his recognition today of their skill and the good work that they perform?

Is my right hon. Friend also aware that the company's hangar, which he opened, was built by Reids of Christchurch, in my constituency, that the Schlumberger computer factory in my constituency substantially increased its profits in 1991, that School Book Fairs has moved to larger premises twice in the past three years, and that Revvo Castors has just won the biggest single contract in its history? Does that not represent a combination of the Government rewarding success, and good management and dedicated work forces earning the rewards that they deserve?

Mr. Clark: Yes, of course. My hon. Friend forgot to mention the dedicated and assiduous lobbying by the Member of Parliament which, I have no doubt, contributed to the outcome. I well recall that day, and I was most impressed by the quality of Flight Refuelling. I am sure that the greatly extended contract it has with the Ministry reflects that.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I do not dissent from the need for various items of equipment to be purchased and for other items to be enhanced. However, does the Minister realise that we discern from his statement that many of the contracts will be distributed to areas of marked political marginality? Will the contracts that are not to be devoted to such areas be delayed unduly as a consequence of the approaching election?

Over what period will the contracts and expenditure run? I ask that not least because the expenditure is substantial. There are also residual fears that material and equipment are being organised while there may be cause for anxiety about the capacity of the armed forces, especially the Air Force, to maintain their essential training purpose.

Mr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman does no justice to our Procurement Executive. We place contracts on the basis not of the marginality of a constituency, but of the capability, record and competence of the companies concerned. The British defence industry is fortunate in being so rich in talent and capability. If the hon. Gentleman looks at where most of the contracts have been placed—we have not yet heard from the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and I do not know whether we shall——

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): You will.

Mr. Clark: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will disclose to us whether he is concerned with the marginality of his seat.

I remind the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) of the three type 23 frigates which came from constituencies that, optimistic though I am about the result of the general election, are not likely to return a Conservative Member of Parliament.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Will my right hon. Friend accept that I am delighted by the very large new defence orders which will cover a great deal of the United Kingdom? May I press him a little further on Leuchars and on the order for new helicopters? Will they be stationed there for search and rescue? In Scotland, there is very high regard for the skill and airmanship of the air crew in the helicopter squadron. We want the helicopters to be stationed near the mountains and the hostile seas of the north. I hope that some of the helicopters will go there.

Mr. Clark: I appreciate my hon. Friend's concern. It is an important subject which must be considered separately from the decision to purchase the helicopters which will greatly enhance the capability, as I am sure my hon. Friend welcomes.

Mr. Cryer: When the stocks of ALARM are replenished, what will happen to the jobs in Bradford and elsewhere which were listed in the statement? Is it not time that the Ministry of Defence and the Government as a whole recognised the importance of public expenditure in creating jobs? Will the Ministry of Defence work with the other Departments to produce a planned changeover from military expenditure, which is of finite and limited capacity, to civilian expenditure so that, for example, we could compete in world markets for aircraft instead of relying for the retention of high quality jobs, such as those in Bradford, on military expenditure with its limited potential for sustaining jobs? It is time that the Minister stopped sneering at the idea of changing from military to peaceful purposes. The whole world will do it, and it is time that he caught up.

Mr. Clark: I am not sneering at the idea. I simply say that the hon. Gentleman has in his constituency a very good factory which makes very capable equipment. The hon. Gentleman returns frequently on the Floor of the House to his diversification plans. He seeks to set up some kind of fund and to put in place some busybodies and officials who tell factories what to make, and who interpret the market by goodness knows what criteria. Such people would generally divert the factories from making useful and vital defence equipment to making, what—buckets with holes in them? I do not know what the hon. Gentleman proposes.

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement which fulfils the Government's pledges about appropriate adaptability for our future defence needs. Does he agree that the award of the contract to Racal Avionics, in my constituency, has nothing to do with electoral considerations, as Opposition Members have claimed? It merely reflects the expertise of that company and shows that the company is a worldwide leader. It will open the way to further contracts to export markets throughout the world.

Mr. Clark: That is absolutely right. It is an outstanding company. Our endorsement of its capabilities for our own orders will, I hope, also open the export market for which it has considerable potential.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the Minister confirm that what he has announced is within the

existing procurement budget for his Ministry and that over the years that budget will decline? Could he give us some idea how many jobs are likely to be created by the expenditure of the £500 million and what proportion of those jobs will be in Scotland? As he will know, a report commissioned by Scottish Enterprise on defence in Scotland draws certain conclusions, including in particular that the number of defence jobs in Scotland will diminish in the next five to 10 years. What action does the Minister propose to take to arrest that decline and transfer some of the jobs to civilian needs?

Mr. Clark: I do not wish to give the hon. Gentleman precise figures on the breakdown between the two countries. However, I am ready to enter into correspondence with him. In doing so, I should like to ask him about his party's attitude to defence jobs in Scotland. It has some pretty peculiar standpoints on defence in general. I should like to know whether there is any consistency between being ready to provide equipment for Her Majesty's armed forces and some of the eccentricities of the hon. Gentleman's party. It would be an interesting correspondence and I look forward to it developing.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): As my right hon. Friend is aware, many aspects of his statement will be welcomed throughout the west country, which remains heavily defence industry dependent. Does he agree that, with many of the orders which affect British Aerospace not only in my constituency but throughout the country, he has built on the proven expertise in several defence-related areas, with the result that the company will remain in the forefront of the world market?

Mr. Clark: Yes, indeed. We are building on proven expertise. We are extremely fortunate in Britain to have such a wide range of industrial defence expertise, which provides necessary equipment and will do so in the next decade for not only our forces but those of our allies and friendly customers.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): First, will the Minister reconsider his answer to the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro)? Leuchars has performed marvellous helicopter operations both in the mountains and the North sea—which might be important. Secondly, forgive my ignorance, but what exactly is the purpose of Skynet 4, stage 2? What is its cost likely to be? I am not necessarily being critical, but the House of Commons ought to know.

Mr. Clark: The House of Commons will know immediately. The purpose is to enhance our capability in communications under what may be increasingly difficult conditions in the next decade. It is not likely to come into service before 1997. The overall cost will be in the region of £200 million.

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and the implications that it has for jobs in the Portsmouth travel-to-work area. I note that it is the latest in a long line of statements since "Options for Change", the theme of which was "smaller but better equipped". It is unworthy to think that he has made his statement just because the general election is approaching. I hope that such statements will continue to be made up to the general election and beyond it for the sake of defence workers throughout Britain.

Mr. Clark: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. All this was foreshadowed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in his statement "Britain's Defence for the 1990s". However, it takes some time to put such changes into place. It involves a gradual reorientation and restructuring of our forces to adapt to the changed conditions. I hope that there will be many more such statements because the expenditure and contracts that we are placing are effecting a shift in our capability. Against a background of reducing our forces, the changes are making our forces more effective.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Since there are apparently 17 or 18 parliamentary days before the general election, may we work on the assumption that goodies for marginal areas will be announced virtually every day?

Mr. Clark: I certainly hope so.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): My constituents will welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement about continuing further orders for ALARM. Is it not a fact that the ASRAAM project will be more secure with this Government than under the Labour party?

Mr. Clark: Yes. It is time that that was repeated and recognised widely. It is almost embarrassing that every time that we make a statement on defence procurement it is wholeheartedly endorsed by the Labour party and Labour Members chide us for our delay in putting it in place. ASRAAM is a good example. It is a major enhancement of air-to-air capability and a large sum of money is attached to it. If I am able to catch your eye to make a statement, Mr. Speaker—I would venture to predict, but I shall not spoil the atmosphere by suggesting what it will be—I look forward to the Labour party's reaction on that occasion.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Just think how many school books and pieces of vital hospital equipment that £500 million could have bought. Since Conservative Members are wedded to the idea of competitive tendering in local government, are those contracts subject to the process of competitive tendering? How much was recovered by the Ministry of Defence last year from fraud perpetrated on British taxpayers by defence suppliers?

Mr. Clark: I cannot answer the latter question, but if there is anything in it, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

As to alternative forms of expenditure for those large sums of money, I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman may have a different set of priorities from myself, or from those on his Front Bench. I strongly urge him to raise those matters. Does his skin not creep a little when he hears the Labour Front-Bench Members repeatedly endorsing such programmes? I do not know what arcane machinery the Labour party has to settle such issues. Are there no committees, conventions or groups in which that could be raised? If so, why does the hon. Gentleman not get on with it?

Mr. Robert Boscawen (Somerset and Frome): Does my right hon. Friend accept that it was an extraordinarily sensible decision to order six Sea Kings? They are a well tried, well proven advertisement for Westland at this time, when it has to fill the gap before production of the next

[Mr. Robert Boscawen]

model, which will come along in seven or eight years. We can be sure that the work force there will ensure that it is an excellent aircraft.

Mr. Clark: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend has said. There was a major leap forward in capability between the Wessex and the Sea King, which can fly at night, has a much longer loiter time, can cover much greater distances faster and is generally a far more capable instrument in that extremely important field.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Is the Minister aware that, representing a seat in a city which is more heavily dependent on defence contracts than almost anywhere else in the country—he knows that because of the questions that I have asked him in the past few years—I believe that defence expenditure ought to be radically cut and that that expenditure ought to be shifted, in a planned way, to civilian projects, not only to protect the jobs of extremely skilled workers in the defence industry but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said, to provide socially useful things?

Since the Minister said that his statement reflected shifting priorities and the reducing level of the forces, why does he not complement such statements with the announcement of serious studies into defence conversion? Without that, we shall carry on with the anarchic haemorrhage of jobs from British Aerospace and elsewhere and the skills which have taken years, if not decades, to hone will go to waste.

Mr. Clark: I am not certain of the hon. Gentleman's present relationship with the Labour party.

Mr. Nellist: I have been expelled from it.

Mr. Clark: Oh, he has been expelled. As the views that he has just articulated are those held by the majority of the Labour party, I do not understand why it does not welcome him back in.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): My right hon. Friend's statement will be widely welcomed in the north-west, especially at Warton, close to my constituency. Will my right hon. Friend give some sign of the value of the work which will go to Warton for the air defence system for the F3 Tornado? Will he also confirm that, unlike the Labour party's foreign affairs spokesman—who last week made it clear on television that the Labour party would ban arms sales to the middle east—we will continue to supply defence equipment to Saudi Arabia and our other friends in the Gulf?

Mr. Clark: The immediate approximate value of the Tornado enhancement is about £27 million. British Aerospace is also heavily involved because of the announcements in the statement about the new Harriers, the Skynet system and others.

We regard the Saudi Government as an extremely important customer. They work closely with us in developing systems and we work closely with them on a military and civilian level with the British Aerospace support teams.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Was the right hon. Gentleman present for the statement?

Mr. Benn *indicated assent.*

Mr. Speaker: In that case, Mr. Benn.

Mr. Benn: Is the Minister aware that every family of four in Britain, sometimes hard pressed by unemployment and mortgage payments, is now paying more than £30 a week for defence expenditure when the cold war is over? Is he aware that the strength of Japan and Germany derives from the fact that they have a much lower defence expenditure and have put that money into industrial production? Is he aware that, at the end of the war, 4 million people were shifted from the armed forces and the defence industry into civilian production, which built our industrial base? Is he also aware that the sale of arms to Iraq and the Argentine is one of the reasons why people throughout the country think that the defence sales programme is often wholly irresponsible?

Mr. Clark: The right hon. Gentleman asked about seven questions. He gave a very impressive demonstration, which will probably be more effective in terms of quality and comprehension than that which we shall have from the Labour Front-Bench spokesman in a couple of minutes. The right hon. Gentleman's questions lead me to ask him whether he is comfortable in the Labour party now, or would he prefer to join his hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist)?

Mr. Benn: Be serious.

Mr. Clark: I am being serious. This is a much more serious point than a detailed repetition of my previous answers. What is the Labour party's attitude? How comfortable do the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues feel within the Labour party?

Mr. Benn: Answer the question.

Mr. Clark: Or would he prefer to be expelled?

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that his decision to upgrade the Lynx helicopters will mean more work for Basildon? Is he also aware that, when he visits GEC Census in Basildon tomorrow, he will receive a warm welcome? Will he take that opportunity to cock a snook at the nuclear-free zone sign which the Labour-controlled council has put up outside the factory gates and which is deeply insulting to the local, excellent work force?

Mr. Clark: I am greatly looking forward to my visit to Basildon. I shall make a point of making an appropriate gesture in the direction of the sign. I agree with my hon. Friend that it must be most offensive to people whose skills, capabilities and dedication contribute so much to our defence effort to be constantly reminded of the idiocies——

Mr. Tony Banks: They do not make nuclear bombs in Basildon.

Mr. Clark: That attitude is shared by some Opposition Members, whom I will not identify.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): My right hon. Friend's statement will be welcome by those who sat through the tortuous and often painful procedure

of the Government going for smaller but better equipped armed forces. Bearing in mind what he said today and the response of the Labour party, who does he think that the public and those in the procurement industry will believe —those on the Opposition Front Bench, the fire trench, who say, "Let's have more, let's have it quicker," or the two thirds sat behind them shouting, "Never, never"? Who is speaking the truth for those whose jobs are at stake?

Mr. Clark: If people have any doubt, they need only look at the proceedings of successive Labour party conferences and the constitution of the Labour party, which obliges it to pay regard to conference resolutions. They should also consider the Opposition's constantly repeated theme of a text originally written by Mr. Bruce Kent, who I understand is seeking to become a Member of this House. They would then have little doubt.

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): Is my right hon. Friend aware that he has the deepest gratitude of the workers at British Aerospace in the north-west? Is he further aware that the voters of the area appreciate that they owe their future well-being, and the security of the nation, to the Minister's policy statement today?

Mr. Clark: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. The workers at British Aerospace are part of our outstanding reservoir of skill and technical proficiency. They have an absolutely essential part to play in maintaining the equipment and standard of our armed forces.

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): Will my right hon. Friend accept that, in recent years, the Westland work force and management have worked very hard indeed to increase productivity and cut costs? Will he further accept that this welcome order for Westland will not just apply in Yeovil and benefit my constituents but will be spread among a large number of sub-contractors throughout the country?

Mr. Clark: That is absolutely true, and it is a feature of defence orders, particularly in the high-tech sphere. A large number of sub-contractors and other providers scattered throughout the country benefit from such contracts. I also gladly join my hon. Friend in referring to the quality of the work force and management at Westland, particularly their innovative and technical proficiency in certain key sectors of helicopter design.

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): The people who live in Welwyn Hatfield and those who live and work in Stevenage will welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Will he join me in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Mr. Wood), who led a vigorous quest for jobs in his area? Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a bit rich to listen to the complaints of Opposition Members, who would cut defence spending by £6 billion, or 27 per cent?

Mr. Clark: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I entirely endorse what he says, and the discomfort with which Opposition Members have received that repeated truth this afternoon is an indication of their anxiety on the subject, and their knowledge that what they say is not in any degree endorsed or shared by the electorate.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I wish to express my warm appreciation to my right hon. Friend for a statement which is not only industrially of great benefit to the country but represents one of the most significant enhancements of British air power in its widest sense for a long time. Can he say at this stage whether the launch of the Skynet 4, stage 2, satellite will be placed with Ariane Space as a token of our commitment to the European space programme?

Mr. Clark: I would not wish to identify the launch as a token of anything. It should be judged on the basis of competitive tendering. Ariane Space can tender for it, but we want to achieve value for money and the best possible capability of getting the satellite up and keeping it up.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): I thank my right hon. Friend for the work that will come to Thorn EMI, that eminent and expert company in my constituency, for the missile replacement. He will be aware that, although his decision may not create additional jobs, it will give great security to the jobs that already exist.

Mr. Clark: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is an excellent company, and I hope that there will be further orders for it as our equipment programme develops. As my hon. Friend says, the company has a useful and important element of the announcement.

Dr. Reid: I accept the apology that was graciously extended by the Minister. He will recognise that it is not fair to say that I did not welcome the proposals— *[Interruption.]* I used the word six times during my contribution. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman does not understand what Opposition Members are saying because he is not listening.

While I accept that at this stage the Minister may not be able to clarify the position of Leuchars, the subject raised by the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), may I ask him to say when it is likely to be clarified? Can he confirm that, despite today's announcement, we have lost nearly 40,000 jobs in the last year and more than 70,000 jobs in the last 18 months in the defence industry? Will he also confirm that defence industrialists have told him that, unless the Government provide a firmer direction for defence industry policy, as many as 123,000 defence jobs could go throughout the country?

As the Minister has decided to mention the good news and the areas that it affects, will he confirm that the loss of those 123,000 jobs will have a disastrous effect on Edinburgh, Preston, south Manchester, Bolton, Derby, Coventry, Stevenage, Weybridge, Portsmouth, Southampton and Bristol? Is not it about time that the Government did something to assist the transition from defence to civil production?

Mr. Clark: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for doing my work for me and identifying the constituencies that would be so severely at risk were the Labour party ever to form a Government. I thank the hon. Gentleman for welcoming my announcement. I did not complain about his welcoming it, although I said that it might cause great embarrassment to his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). I simply said that he had little else to say, which was why he consumed so much time fiddling about over the minutiae of the statement's title.

I constantly have meetings with the leading members of the industry. Such a dialogue is extremely important during a transitional stage for the defence industry. I can

[Mr. Clark]

honestly say that none of the leading members of the industry have ever mentioned a figure of 123,000 jobs, although all of them—I betray no confidence—have expressed their apprehension about what might happen were the Labour party ever to form a Government.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 6 MARCH

Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. Gerald Bowden
Sir Rhodes Boyson
Mr. Martin Redmond

Coal Imports

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that two years ago, under the private Bill procedure, the House passed a Bill promoted by a company called Associated British Ports. It was called the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill. When it was in Committee, a leading QC representing the promoters said that the port concerned would not be used for coal imports into this country.

In the past 24 hours, Associated British Ports has said that it will go ahead, in conjunction with National Power and PowerGen, with building a coal-handling terminal at Immingham on Humberside to bring between 10 million and 12 million tonnes of coal per annum into that area. That is a further threat to the British coalfields, which made representations, through local authorities and other organisations, during the passage of the Bill. They and the House were gravely misled during the Bill's passage. Having been misled in what way, what can we now do to protect the jobs of thousands of workers in the British coal mining industry?

Mr. Speaker: I recollect the passage of the Bill because it took a number of opposed Private Business slots at 7 o'clock. I can do nothing about it, however, because it is now an Act of Parliament.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Bill took a long time to get through the House because it masqueraded as a private Bill, whereas in fact it was a political Bill based on destroying the coal industry and increasing the balance of payments deficit by importing coal. The Chairman nominated by the Tory party, the hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark), was not independent, as he should have been to chair a private Bill Committee. He was a consultant to a firm that was a subsidiary body of the firm that carried out the proposal at Immingham. The whole matter should be examined afresh.

Mr. Speaker: I recollect that allegation having been made—*[Interruption.]* Order. I hope that those comments were not directed to me.

Mr. Skinner: No, Mr. Speaker; they were directed at the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim), the one wearing Pampers.

Mr. Speaker: I deprecate these personal allegations, from whichever side they came.

BILL PRESENTED

Blasphemy

Mr. Harry Greenway presented a Bill to make provision for the punishment of persons who blaspheme against certain religions: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 6 March and to be printed. [Bill 84.]

Prisons (Rehabilitation of Drug Addicts)

4.19 pm

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for the treatment of prisoners who are addicted to drugs, and for consequential organisational changes; and for connected purposes.

This Bill provides for the setting up of drug-free wings in prisons for the treatment of gaoled addicts. This morning, on the BBC's "Today" programme, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary discussed the recent crime figures. During the course of the discussion he disclosed that 40 per cent. of all crimes are drug-related. In other words, 40 per cent. of all crimes are committed either by somebody under the influence of drugs or in order to feed the habit. My Bill is intended to help to deal with this problem.

In my constituency at Stockport the police divisional commander, Chief Superintendent Whittle, has long contended that drug-taking has much to do with the recent explosion in property crime. This view is supported by Paul Cavadino of the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, who said recently:

"Our own research department found that most young heroin users were social security claimants with an average legitimate income of £45 a week, but they spent on average £500 a week on heroin, and 80 per cent. of them were continuously involved in an enormous amount of crime to finance their drug habit."

It is small wonder, then, that so many cars are broken into, handbags snatched and elderly people prayed upon—and worse.

The purpose of the Bill is to introduce spot urine tests for all prisoners and, furthermore, to make provision for special prison wings which prisoners addicted to drugs could volunteer to enter. Far too often people go to gaol as addicts and come out as addicts. Indeed, a recent reply from my right hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold), Minister of State for the Home Department, whom I am glad to see on the Front Bench, to my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) disclosed that in the year ending 31 December 1991 there were 683 drug equipment finds in our prisons. There were many needles that had been sharpened and used over and over again. It is small wonder that there is an HIV explosion among prisoners.

Furthermore, 90 per cent. of males attending London drug dependency units have a history of conviction, and almost one quarter of all women going to gaol are estimated to be drug-dependent, and most of those are injecting. With the exception of Scotland—an addiction unit has been set up in Low Moss prison, Strathclyde—we have so far been doing little to improve the situation in gaols. Many addicts go to goal and come out just as addicted as when they went in.

My Bill provides that we follow the example set by prisons in Holland. Dutch prisons legislation provides for the setting up of separate wings designed for drug addicts. It is estimated that in Holland addicts comprise about 30 per cent. of the prison population. When remanded or sentenced, addicted prisoners are given the option of going into a drug-free unit manned by specially trained officers. Each inmate has to undergo a urine test every day, and if he fails once he goes back into the main stream.

The advantages of this system are twofold. First, if addicts anxious to be cured are kept in a rigid regime separate from mainstream prisoners they will not be tempted by prisoners dealing in drugs. As my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) disclosed to the House, a recent *British Medical Journal* study showed that two thirds of convicted drug addicts "found needles in prison and injected with them".—[*Official Report*, 14 June 1990; Vol. 174, c. 452]

It would be so much better to have urine tests instead of providing needles for addicts in gaol, as someone suggested.

The second advantage is that, if the detoxification programme is successful—all the signs from Holland are that it will be—there is less chance of former addicts reoffending. That would be good for my right hon. Friend's crime figures, good for addicts and, most importantly, good for the victims of crime, of which there are far too many. I commend my Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Tony Favell, Mr. James Cran, Mr. Christopher Gill and Mr. Chris Butler.

PRISONS (REHABILITATION OF DRUG ADDICTS)

Mr. Tony Favell accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for the treatment of prisoners who are addicted to drugs, and for consequential organisational changes; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 21 February and to be printed. [Bill 85.]

Opposition Day

[5TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Recession and Unemployment

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. Due to the large number of hon. Members who wish to participate in the debate, I propose to place a 10-minute limit on speeches between 7 and 9 pm. If those called before that time make brief contributions, it may be possible to relax the time limit.

4.26 pm

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the continuing recession which has caused the longest period of continuously falling output since the Second World War; notes that Government promises of recovery from recession have been totally unfounded; condemns the record level of business failures and house repossessions, the damaging decline in manufacturing investment and manufacturing output, and the accelerating rate of unemployment which has risen for 22 months in succession; and calls upon the Government to adopt policies which promote investment, reduce unemployment, and tackle Britain's major training and skills crisis.

In the wind-up speech at the end of last year's Budget debate, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

"I am not in the business of publishing forecasts that are more optimistic than I think is the case, as that leads us nowhere. It is better to put the facts before Parliament and the country."

He continued:

"There is every reason to expect that growth will start again towards the middle of the year."—[*Official Report*, 25 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 698.]

It is difficult to disagree with the Chancellor that forecasts should not be based on false optimism, and that facts should be put properly before Parliament and the country. Unfortunately, despite the Chancellor's cautious tone and his admonition against bogus predictions, he and the Prime Minister have spent the year since that Budget engaged in little else.

Growth did not start again towards the middle of last year. Indeed, it does not look as though it will start before the middle of this year. Month after month, the Chancellor and the Prime Minister promised that recovery was just around the corner. The Chancellor often found interesting ways of expressing his words of optimism and self-encouragement. In June he detected "vague and faint stirrings". In September he found statistics that were "highly encouraging". In October he was convinced—admittedly in the curious atmosphere of the Conservative party conference—that

"the green shoots of economic spring are appearing once again."

It was not only the Chancellor who indulged in a bit of bogus forecasting. The Secretary of State for the Environment, who has replaced the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for this debate—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"]—claimed——

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is well known that in the run-up to a Budget speech, the Chancellor of the Exchequer does not make major speeches. Is it in order for the right hon. and learned Gentleman to imply that it is in some way wrong for the Chancellor of the Exchequer not to be here?

Mr. Speaker: I did not hear that implication. I simply heard the right hon. and learned Gentleman say that there had been a change on the Front Bench. It is perfectly in order.

Mr. Smith: I am surprised that the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) did not hear me refer to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and not to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I can only conclude that he was not following the debate with his usual close attention.

I am glad that the Secretary of State for the Environment is taking part in our economic debates. I make no points against that; I am sure that his contribution will be valuable. He gets involved in economic matters from time to time, and he told us on 5 November, as reported in *The Guardian*, that the evidence of housing starts

"powerfully reinforces the Chancellor's message. They herald renewed hope for all those anxious to move house. Britain is pulling out of recession."

That prompted an instant reaction from the House-Builders Federation, which represents builders accounting for 70 per cent. of national output. A propos the Secretary of State's observations, Mr. Roger Humber, director of the federation, said:

"Rubbish. . . . Customer confidence is falling, house sales are weakening and confidence is clearly undermined by rising unemployment."

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is a familiar interrupter; I will give way once again.

Mr. Nicholls: While the hon. and learned Gentleman is on the subject of the recession, will he name one major commentator who thinks that tax increases are the way out of recession?

Mr. Smith: I think that the hon. Gentleman was referring to taxes rather than taxis. We will deal with that argument when we come to it. There are so many commentators critical of the Government's economic record—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I will make my arguments on their own merits.

Mr. Nicholls: Just one.

Mr. Smith: I know that right hon. and hon. Members on the Government Benches do not wish to be reminded of the frequent predictions of recovery which were made last year, but they are highly relevant to the debate today.

I return to the Chancellor. On 20 December, when the figures for GDP in the third quarter of 1991 were published, the Chancellor went so far as to claim that there had been what he called a technical end to the recession. *[Interruption.]* They are at it again.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are not getting off to a good start if we have interruptions from a sedentary position.

Mr. Smith: The Chancellor claimed that there had been a technical end to the recession. He could only make such a claim because of the inclusion of oil production in the figures. The onshore economy for that quarter was clearly still in recession. He should perhaps have borne in mind the view expressed by the Bank of England quarterly bulletin for February 1992, which comments on whether oil should be relied upon in such an analysis and which

might be thought to be a reasonably objective commentator on such matters. The Bank of England states:

"The slight rise in GDP in the third quarter came about because North sea oil production recovered sharply, having been particularly depressed by essential safety and maintenance work in the previous quarter. As part of the product of the economy, oil output should not be disregarded; but its liability recently to erratic movements can obscure the underlying trend in aggregate activity. It may be more helpful, therefore, to look at non-oil output, which fell in the third quarter for the fifth consecutive quarter. This is as long a period of continually falling output as on any previous occasion since the war."

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I doubt whether that frank analysis will be regarded as helpful by the Government, but it puts the matter clearly and unambiguously. The result of the Government's policies is that we have had the longest recession in the post-war era.

We should also bear in mind the Bank's analysis when the GDP figures for the final quarter of 1991 are announced tomorrow. The non-oil GDP may well have fallen yet again. That would be the sixth consecutive drop in succession.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): While the right hon. and learned Gentleman is on the subject of accuracy of forecasting, does he recollect that his Front-Bench spokesmen said last week that they saw no signs of a recession in Germany? Yet there seems to be one there now. Is this not a worldwide recession? Surely he can no longer rely on accusing the British Government, uniquely, of having created recession.

Mr. Smith: It would certainly be instructive to compare the German and British economies. I shall deal a little later in my speech with the general excuse that the Government have promoted, about a so-called world recession being responsible for the British condition. I remind the hon. Gentleman that in the last full year, 1991, the German economy grew by 3 per cent. while ours shrank by 2·5 per cent. Germany has had some quarters of negative growth, but they have been only small reductions in its overall output compared with the British ones.

Investment in Germany grew by 6·6 per cent. last year. It is forecast to grow by 3·8 per cent. this year. Investment in the United Kingdom fell by 10·75 per cent. German unemployment was 4·5 per cent., contrasting with the figures for this country. Germany is forecast to have employment growth in 1992 while the United Kingdom is forecast to have a fall in employment. Most people would prefer the German economy to the British economy under its present management.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I will not. I must get on with my speech——

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I know that Conservative Members are trying to distract the attention of the House—and no doubt of a wider audience—from what I have to say, but I intend to persist with the case that I am making about what is happening to our economy.

Mr. Oppenheim *rose*——

Mr. Smith: Last week the effects of the continuing recession were made abundantly clear—*[Interruption.]* I am certainly glad that I did not give way before to the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow)—all that he does is to make sedentary interruptions.

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mr. Smith: One of the few things that I cannot be accused of is failure to give way, but I have already given way enough times in this debate. Last week——

Mr. Oppenheim *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I have already made it clear that I will not give way.

Last week, the effects of the continuing recession were made abundantly clear in the clutch of economic indicators released on what has come to be known as black Thursday. Manufacturing investment was shown to have fallen sharply, manufacturing output continued to decline and unemployment rose by more than 53,000. These gloomy statistics were accompanied by the announcement of large redundancies by major British companies such as Ford and British Aerospace—figures which are not yet included in the economic statistics.

The reaction of Ministers to those events was curious. Some were subdued and clearly embarrassed. Even the Prime Minister was obliged to concede that the news was, as he chose to put it, "disappointing". One Minister, however, took a different view: the hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), a Minister at the Department of Social Security, said that redundant workers at British Aerospace had been "liberated". Such an attitude takes one back to the article in the *Financial Times* on 6 February last year in which an unidentified Conservative Minister justified Conservative economic policy as follows——

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No, I will not.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order to quote unidentified Ministers from the Dispatch Box? How do we know——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The only behaviour that has been out of order so far has been Conservative Members' persistent attempts to intervene when the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) has made it clear that he does not intend to give way.

Mr. Smith: The article in the *Financial Times* said:

"One Minister was adamant that high interest rates remained the purgative needed to flush out the unreal yuppy jobs in the South-East created in the last part of the 1980s, just as the recession early in the last decade had cleared out the unreal jobs created by Labour."

There we have it. Skilled engineering workers in the north have been liberated; service industry employees in the south have had their unreal jobs purged. That is the Tory message to Britain.

Our people look on in amazement at a Government who seem rooted in indecision, unwilling or incapable of acting to move Britain out of recession. The self-congratulatory terms of the Government's amendment to the motion today make that all too clear. We are invited to congratulate the Government on their success in

[Mr. Smith]

winning the so-called battle against inflation and in bringing down interest rates. Why was that battle against inflation necessary? After all, in 1987 the Prime Minister, writing a pre-election article in the *Hunts Herald & Post*, said:

"Inflation has gone, the economy is sound, unemployment is falling, living standards are rising."

On 14 January 1988, in the autumn statement debate when the Prime Minister was Chief Secretary, he told us:

"Inflation is low and will remain so".—[*Official Report*, 14 January 1988; Vol. 125, c. 549.]

In fact, between 1988 and 1990 inflation went on to double. Why should those who put it up be congratulated on taking it down, particularly when the price of their deflationary action has been record bankruptcies, record repossessions and high and rising unemployment? For that matter, why should those who put up interest rates so high be congratulated on bringing them down? The Government go on to congratulate themselves on reducing the balance of payments deficit, but do they not realise the significance of having a multi-billion pound deficit in the midst of a damaging recession?

The Secretary of State for the Environment, who was brought in at a late stage to this debate, could not have been consulted about the terms of the Government amendment. After all, in an interesting speech that he gave to the Tory Reform Group at the Conservative party conference in Blackpool in October 1989 entitled

"A Fourth Term: Why re-elect the Tories?"—

the question mark is a particularly interesting part of that title—the Secretary of State said:——

Mr. Marlow: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is an important debate about the recession. Are we not entitled to know what policies the Opposition have to deal with the recession? All we are getting is knockabout.

Mr. Smith: The wider public outside will find the behaviour of Conservative Members in this debate extremely interesting. Conservative Members are far better at handing it out than they are at taking it.

In 1989 the Secretary of State for the Environment said:

"Britain is not paying its way. We have a serious balance of payments problem . . . I beg our Party not to believe that a deficit on overseas trade is of incidental importance, self-correcting, easily financed. I don't believe a word of it."

If the right hon. Gentleman believes that, why should there be satisfaction about still having a substantial deficit in the midst of a recession—a deficit which, as the autumn statement tells us, is forecast to deteriorate still further to a figure of £9·5 billion in 1992?

What is staggering about the Government is not just that they are not willing in public debate to accept responsibility for causing and perpetuating the longest recession since the war: they are, as is the habit of the modern Tory party, actively seeking to blame others for our present economic misery.

The rules of the game for the Conservative party are well known: if everything goes well, it is to the Government's credit—if anything goes wrong, it is not their fault.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Smith: Thinking it implausible to blame the last Labour Government after a period of nearly 13 years of Conservative rule, the Government have been on the hunt for another scapegoat. On every occasion these days when Ministers are asked to explain the causes of Britain's economic difficulties, they are instructed to utter the magic words "world recession". We have had that already today.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Smith: It is an unsubtle and wholly bogus attempt to explain away the cause of the recession as an unfortunate foreign contagion, rather like a mediaeval plague, which no Government could avoid or counteract and which subverted the virtuous course of economic progress in which Britain until then was leading the world. That is the message that the Government wish to impress upon the public in every broadcast and in every speech on every occasion. It is an old technique—the constant repetition of the bogus excuse.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Smith: In view of Conservative Members' behaviour, I feel little incentive to give way. If they cannot abide by the rules of the House, they cannot expect to be supported by the rules of the House.

Unfortunately for the Government, the evidence of the real causes of the British recession are here at home. It was a recession made at Nos. 10 and 11 Downing street. It is patently clear—*[Interruption.]* I shall persist against barracking and interruption for as long as it is necessary to do so because there is a message that Conservative Members want to drown out but which Parliament and the public must hear.

Mr. Roger King: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wonder if I can help. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) has just said that he will not give way against a background of noise. I speak on behalf of all my colleagues when I say that we shall remain totally silent for every piece of policy that the right hon. and learned Gentleman comes across with.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: When hon. Members offer to be helpful, I start to quake.

Mr. Smith: To return to the subject of the debate, it is patently clear to anyone who investigates the matter that the British recession was not caused by a world recession. It was the direct result of the roller-coaster economics which promoted an unsustainable credit and consumer boom, followed by a savage deflation which plunged our economy into its present condition.

Exactly that point was made by the Governor of the Bank of England in March last year in evidence to the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service after last year's Budget. At page 26 of the report, the Governor said:

"The recession here is in response to what was undeniably an excessive growth in previous years and what might be called unilateral correction by us."

No mention there of a world recession. Indeed, the use of the word "unilateral" points in the opposite direction.

On the very next day, the Chancellor appeared before the same Committee. Asked whether he agreed with what the Governor had said, he replied:

"I do not think there is a worldwide recession as there was in the early 1980s. I think it is absolutely true"—

I hope that Conservative Members will listen to this if to nothing else—

"that the main cause and origin of the recession is a response to the very fast growth—which exceeded the underlying rate of growth capacity."

Why was there no reference to a recession then, when the Chancellor was explaining how the recession had occurred? Although that frank admission by the Chancellor to the Select Committee has been noticeably absent from recent speeches in the House by the Chancellor and his colleagues, they know that it is the truth and that in the end it cannot be avoided.

Only last month, the Chancellor penned an article in a United States economic journal, *International Economic Insights*, in which, under the title "UK Economic Policy: Lessons from History", he re-examined recent developments in the British economy. In a section headlined "The Boom and its Aftermath", the Chancellor explained:

"in the latter stages of the boom it was becoming clear that macro-economic discipline was being threatened by one of the Government's micro-economic reforms, deregulation of the financial sector."

The right hon. Gentleman went on:

"There was an explosion in bank lending . . . which unleashed a boom in asset prices, which generated an unprecedented and unsustainable surge in consumer spending. Government macro economic policy then turned to the task of curbing the inflationary consequences of that boom. The main policy instrument was high interest rates."

That is pure Treasury-speak for "boom and bust"—home-grown, domestically caused, without a hint of a foreign bacillus.

With unusual candour and precision, the Chancellor set out to his American readers exactly what had gone wrong, and common sense reinforces his interpretation. What malign foreign influence pushed our domestic construction industry into its worst recession for 40 years? What external force has so severely depressed the domestic retail sector in Britain? From which foreign part did we import mortgage misery, and which foreigners are repossessing the thousands of homes that British families are being forced to leave?

The Chancellor has, as I have noted, been frank, but I regret that no contrition accompanied his candour. Where in all the Government's denials, explanations, contortions and misinformations is there a single word of apology for the misery that they have caused?

It is, I regret to say, even worse than that. If the Government had their time all over again, they would do exactly the same.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No, I will not.

What I have said is not the result of some wild surmise on my part. At a meeting of the National Economic Development Council on 8 Janaury this year, the Chancellor said—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) keeps interrupting, we shall not make much progress. I hope that he will listen to what I am saying. I will repeat my last remarks for his benefit as I doubt whether he is capable of listening and speaking simultaneously.

At the NEDC meeting on 8 January, the Chancellor said:

"the policy would not have been different had we known the outcome."

The right hon. Gentleman told the House much the same at Treasury Question Time on 16 May last year, when he said—it is rather important for Conservative Members to comprehend and remember this—

"Rising unemployment and the recession have been the price that we have had to pay to get inflation down. That price is well worth paying."—[*Official Report*,16 May 1991; Vol. 191, c. 413.]

If we had any lingering doubts about the Government's intentions, the Prime Minister put their position very clearly when he said,

"If it isn't hurting, it isn't working."

Plainly, the Government are now embarrassed about what both the Chancellor and the Prime Minister have said. That was reflected in the Prime Minister's defensive scrambling at Prime Minister's Question Time yesterday. He claimed, for example, that the Chancellor had not "in context", as he put it, made the statement about unemployment and the recession being a price "well worth paying". We all heard him say that. The context, however, was entirely apposite; the Chancellor was answering a question about the link between unemployment and high interest rates, which had been asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett). The exchange can be found in column 413 of *Hansard*, dated 16 May 1991. The Prime Minister's celebrated statement—

"If it isn't hurting, it isn't working"—

conveyed exactly the same depressing message.

It may not be any comfort to the 930 companies going bust every week, the million people who have become unemployed or the thousands of families who have lost their homes to know that it was all part of the Government's plan—that their hurting was necessary to the Government's work. They should be in no doubt, however, as to who is responsible for the disasters that have befallen them. The Government's amendment contains not even a marginal recognition of the real problems of our economy, and the vital need for an investment-led recovery. I believe that we shall have little chance of meeting the challenges of the 1990s successfully if investment continues to fall. Investment is the very life blood of the economy; if it continues at a low level, we shall not be able to close the investment gap between us and our major European competitors.

Since 1979, investment in manufacturing has increased by 47 per cent. in Germany, by 52 per cent. in France, by 73 per cent. in Italy and by more than 100 per cent. in the Netherlands. In Britain, under the present Government, it is below its 1979 level.

The latest figures for manufacturing investment for the last quarter of 1991 show that it is still falling, and that the CBI forecasts a further fall this year. That is why so many other people—as well as Opposition Members—are urging action to stimulate investment. Early action to cut the high interest rate, particularly the high real interest rate, would of course be of particular value to our hard-pressed industrial sector. I believe that there is scope at this stage for the Government to make a further reduction, and they should not hesitate to do so.

The Government should also initiate fiscal incentives to boost investment. Why have they so obstinately set their face against increasing capital allowances, when so many in industry and commerce urge just such a policy? Investment is also crucially needed in the development of human skills. The sad fact is, as every objective international comparison reveals, that Britain lags behind the rest of the Community in provision for training.

Mr. Ted Leadbitter (Hartlepool): In the middle of last year, in another place, the Select Committee on Science and Technology—with a Conservative majority—concluded in its report that the Government had no policy for industry and no policy for Britain. Furthermore, it expressed the view that, if the Government did not alter course, no British-owned manufacturing industry would be left in this country.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend has made a particularly good point. It will register with the Secretary of State for the Environment, whose book "Where There's a Will" is described as a No. 1 best seller. The only thing wrong with the cover is the view expressed by *The Guardian's* Hugo Young that the book is

"Of its kind, the most impressive book I've read by a modern Conservative."

I do not know whether that will do him much good.

In his book, the Secretary of State makes a strong cse for an industrial strategy. *[Interruption.]* I do not suppose that Conservative Members want to hear about that, either, but I suggest that they read the right hon. Gentleman's book—especially those who voted for him in the leadership election.

Mr. Hind *rose*——

Mr. Smith: There is one of them. I will give way to him, because I know that he voted for the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Hind: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. Will he explain how increasing taxation will get Britain out of the recession?

Mr. Smith: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman, in his few remaining weeks in the House of Commons, should understand that Labour's tax and spending proposals mean that we redistribute money to pensioners and the recipients of child benefit. If the hon. Gentleman has any doubt about the effect of such a policy, he can read the comments of City analysts, who have described it as mildly reflationary.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I have only just given way, after repeated sedentary interruptions.

What is disturbing, and what I think that the Secretary of State for the Environment genuinely appreciates—although other Ministers may not—is the problem caused by our poor industrial training. Last year, the Institute for Economic and Social Research published a paper which starkly revealed Britain's weakness in developing intermediate skills. It showed that, in Britain, 31 per cent. of technical workers in manufacturing had no vocational qualifications. In Germany, the figure was only 8 per cent. At higher levels of qualification, only 14 per cent. of British technicians were qualified, while in Germany the figure was 36 per cent.

That could be put in another way. It could be put in this way:

"In West Germany 80 per cent. of fifteen year olds go on to full time vocational schools or employer co-ordinated training schemes. West German employers spend 20 per cent. more on training their workforce than employers in Britain. 94 per cent. of Japanese 16-year-olds stay on at school for another three years. France produces three times as many mechanical and electronic technicians as we do."

That is a direct quotation from the right hon. Gentleman's famous Blackpool Tory conference speech. He clearly understands the nature of the problem. Nor, at that time at least, was he fooled by the Government. He said:

"We can point to the £2 billion we spend on training over and above that which was spent a decade ago. But let us be honest about what this programme really is. The training schemes which we have rightly created in the midst of the unemployment of the early '80s are mostly for those who cannot find work for themselves—to put it bluntly, the least able. But the most urgent problem is not to provide training for those devoid of any, important though that is. The priority is to raise the skill-levels of those clearly able to find employment."

I would not choose to state the problem in precisely the way that the right hon. Gentleman chose for his speech to a Conservative party fringe meeting, but he understands very clearly that all is not well.

How, I wonder, can the right hon. Gentleman honourably justify the policies of a Government who have recently announced yet further cuts in expenditure on training? Next year it will be reduced by more than £170 million. Youth training will be cut by £50 million and employment training by £60, and training in work continues to be woefully neglected by the Government. It is all the more remarkable that training for the unemployed should be cut when the numbers of long-term unemployed have increased so substantially. Only yesterday the Prime Minister was wringing his hands and saying that the increase in long-term unemployment was "extremely unwelcome". If he means what he says, why does he not restore the budget for employment training which has been so drastically reduced?

We need to stimulate investment in new plant and equipment and new technology but that needs to be matched by an equivalent commitment to training for work and for people in work. To compete in a world of constant technological change, the investment and training gaps must be closed. Part of the stimulus to investment—*[Interruption.]* I shall resist Conservative Members' attempts to distract attention from what I am saying.

Part of the stimulus to investment—*[Interruption.]* If what we have heard from Conservative Members is debating, it is not debating as I understand it, but systematic and organised interruption and vanity by people who do not want to hear any criticism of their policies. They are too used to the uncritical columns of the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express* and *The Sun*, but—thank goodness—in this Parliament we can criticise them, and we will.

Part of the stimulus to investment should be regionally directed through the establishment of development agencies—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the House will want in due course to give a fair hearing to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Smith: Part of the stimulus to investment that we need should be regionally directed through development agencies in the English regions and the strengthening of the Welsh Development Agency and Scottish Enterprise and its associated local development companies. The Government constantly scorn a policy of regional economic development. According to them, it is a bureaucratic interference with the free forces of the market. It is, they say, another example of the dreaded

intervention by Government which they, alone among the countries of the European Community, so relentlessly scorn. Had the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry been able to take part in our deliberations this afternoon —he who is the very embodiment of Thatcherite economics—he would undoubtedly have given us that message.

Will the Secretary of State for the Environment deploy such an argument? I wonder. Indeed, I doubt it. In his speech at Blackpool and also in his book "Where There's a Will", he argued the case for action in England to parallel the Scottish and Welsh initiatives. In the book he claimed:

"an English Development Agency would help to do for England what the Scottish and Welsh agencies have for years done in their own countries with great effect."

That is from page 169 for those who want to pursue those interesting comments on the modern economic and political situation. The right hon. Gentleman cannot complain—I am doing my very best to boost sales. As the beneficiary of a past in publishing which has left him extremely well endowed, he should be grateful for such assistance as I am giving him.

Why do not the Government—this is directly related to the Secretary of State's own responsibilities—begin the phased release of capital receipts held by local authorities as a means of reviving the depressed construction industry? Such action is being urged by the industry itself, by local authorities, by the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service and, for all I know, by the Secretary of State for the Environment in arguments within the Government.

When will the Government realise their special obligation to the million people who have been thrown out of work since March 1990 as a result of their policies? There is very little concern shown by any Conservative hon. Members for the unemployed. They are dismissed from Conservative Members' minds and put out of their consideration, but we believe that it is vital that we embark on a temporary work programme which combines jobs experience and training. It is urgently necessary in a country in which unemployment is moving relentlessly upwards as month follows month.

Mr. Butterfill: How much?

Mr. Smith: To the hon. Gentleman who asks me "How much?" I say that our industrial recovery programme should cost about £1 billion, and this country can afford to spend £1 billion to start us on the road to recovery and to start to get unemployment down.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington) *rose*——

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I have told the hon. Gentleman that I shall not give way to him. His persistent attempts are intended merely to disrupt.

Mr. Forman *rose*——

Mr. Smith: If Conservative hon. Gentlemen and hon. Ladies reflect on what has been happening in this debate, they will find that they have very little claim to particular courtesy from me towards them in view of the way in which they have behaved.

Mr. Dicks: What about policies?

Mr. Smith: Hon. Members ask for policies, and we give them policies. We give them policies for investment, for training assuring work in research and development, and policies to deal with the urgent problem of unemployment, but however many policies one gives them, one is wasting one's time because they are not prepared to listen. That is obvious from this debate.

I have little doubt——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has made it very clear that he will not give way. Hon. Gentlemen and hon. Ladies should not persist. May I add that I hope that the hon. Members for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) and for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) will desist from their persistent sedentary interventions. If not, I may find it necessary to invoke disciplinary powers.

Mr. Smith: In the circumstances that you have described, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have been urging proposals on this blinkered Government, but I fear that, as usual, they will reject them. They are increasingly—and rightly—seen by the public as prisoners of their own outdated dogma, unable to recognise the full extent of their own failure.

The Government's amendment to the motion has the gall to claim that Labour policies would lead to a recession. Where on earth do they think we are now? What do they think of their own record? In one period of government, they have created two record-breaking recessions linked by an inflationary boom. In the early 1980s, this crowd of incompetents destroyed more than 20 per cent. of our manufacturing capacity in the deepest recession since the second world war. In the early 1990s, they have created yet another recession—this time the deepest in the service sector and, overall, the longest since the second world war.

Can there be any wonder that their record of economic growth—an average of 1·71 per cent. per annum from 1979 to date—is so dismal? Had they been able over that period to achieve growth even at the British trend rate of 2·5 per cent. which was achieved from the mid-1950s to 1979, in 1991 our GDP would have been £50 billion greater and, on average, every family in Britain would have been £2,200 better off in 1991 alone.

All this was despite the enormous advantages of North sea oil—more than £100 billion in revenues alone. And that does not take account of all the other benefits that North sea oil has conferred on the economy. It is so seldom referred to by Government apologists that from time to time we ought to remind ourselves of its contribution over the past decade. Despite all those advantages—falling commodity prices, for example—the growth record is appalling.

Inevitably, that has been reflected in the standard of living of our people. It is revealing that last week the Treasury itself issued to all British Members of the European Parliament a briefing arguing the case against increasing the British contribution to the Community budget—it is a public document—and one of the key justifications of the case was:

"The UK's relative prosperity has fallen since 1988."

Our representatives in the European Parliament have to argue that our contribution should be less, because we are poorer in relation to the other countries than we were in

[Mr. Smith]

1988. It is a great pity that the Government do not issue a similar document to all Members of the House, especially Conservative Members. It can easily be established by consulting the statistics that the European Community as a whole has achieved 7·5 per cent. since 1988, whereas in Britain, under the management of the present Chancellor of the Exchequer and the present Prime Minister, economic growth since 1988 has been only 1 per cent. No wonder it is said that our standard of living has fallen over that period.

That is proof positive of our relative economic decline under the incompetent management of an increasingly discredited Government. The people of this country will not forget that it was the Chancellor of the Exchequer who told us that rising unemployment and the recession have been a price well worth paying. [HON. MEMBERS: "You have said that before."] Yes, and I shall say it again, from one part of this country to the next, throughout the general election campaign. Conservative Members are all worried about it; they are all frightened about it; they are all guilty about it. It was an appalling thing for a Chancellor to say and it was an even more appalling thing for a Government to do.

Increasingly, the people of this country know that rising unemployment and recession are the totally unacceptable price of having the Conservative party in government. Fortunately for our country, a general election comes closer every day.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to delay the Secretary of State's speech. The House will wish to hear him, as the likely Leader of the Opposition in a few months' time. However, you will be well aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that during the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) there was organised gangsterism. Normally it would be difficult to ascertain which individual hon. Member was responsible, but during the speech many copies of a document were being waved about by Conservative Members. We can therefore ascertain which Conservative Member was responsible for the hooliganism, because under the rules of the House we can take up to 12 copies of a document without charge, but any larger number of copies has to be paid for. Will you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, through the authorities of the House, identify the hon. Member who took all those copies and make sure that—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It was obvious that there were a number of facsimiles of whatever the document was, but I have no evidence to suggest—*[Interruption.]* Order. Let me deal with it. Hon. Members must resume their seats. I have no evidence whether the copies were produced by one individual, or of their source. However, it is obvious that there was behaviour symptomatic of an orchestrated demonstration—*[Interruption.]* Order. In my judgment, that is a matter that the Chair would deprecate—from whichever side of the House it came.

May I advise the House that, whatever the election date may be, we still have several weeks to go before the general election? I very much hope that the House will cool down and steady itself. Perhaps we can now get on with the business. I call Mr. Secretary Heseltine.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I doubt whether it would help matters for me to take any more points of order. I call Mr. Secretary Heseltine.

5.13 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'congratulates Her Majesty's Government on its success in winning the battle against inflation and in bringing interest rates down; welcomes the recent reduction in the balance of payments deficit and the fact that exports are at record levels; notes that the United Kingdom has some of the most competitive tax rates in the world, including the lowest level of corporation tax in either the G7 or the European Community and that Government spending on training has increased by two and a half times over and above the rate of inflation since 1979; recognises that the foundations for economic recovery are now firmly laid; and rejects totally the policies of the Opposition, which would lead to soaring inflation, greater public sector borrowing, higher taxation, increased unemployment, rising interest rates, declining investment and a spiralling cycle of higher wages and prices which would destroy any prospect of recovery and plunge Britain into perpetual recession.'.

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will of course identify the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Monklands—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. John Smith: Monklands, East.

Mr. Heseltine: —the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will know that the main thrust of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's argument was to suggest that the recession in this country was the responsibility of the Government, and of the Government alone.

Nobody questions the nature of the recession with which we have to grapple. It has never been disputed by my colleagues or by myself. It is interesting that in this morning's newspapers the effect on the German economy is so adequately described—to indicate as clearly as possible the effect of recession on that economy.

I fear that this morning's newspapers reveal another casualty of the recession. Labour's campaign, as *The Guardian* reveals, has quite failed to convince the British people that the British Government are to blame. Only 9 per cent. of the British people believe that the recession here is the fault of the British Government.

If the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East has scanned this morning's newspapers, what he will have found interesting is not the uncritical columns of the *Daily Mail* or the *Daily Express*, but what he might have found in the uncritical columns of *The Guardian*. The Labour party, dismayed by the right hon. and learned Gentleman's failure to pin the blame on the Tory Government, is looking for a scapegoat.

I read with some surprise that, despite the onslaught from the Labour party, its members have already lost faith in the man at the front end of the attack. No Conservative Member would say such things, but I understand that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's colleagues, loyal to a man, are concerned that he is

"not radical enough on the economy".

I gather that it is felt—dare I say it—that he is

"less clever than he thinks"

and

"less busy than he should be".

There is even a suspicion growing—only on the Labour side, of course—that he has

"left Labour boxed in",

and that his policies are deflationary and offer little

"comfort for the unemployed or for debt-laden firms".

[AN HON. MEMBER: "Is that *The Guardian*?"] Yes, that was *The Guardian*. The tumbrils are rolling. This evening's *Evening Standard* carries the headline:

"Labour's knives out for Smith".

The debate began as a vote of confidence in the Government's economic policies; it has rapidly become a vote of confidence in the shadow Chancellor. I find no difficulty in agreeing with some of the anxieties that flow from the whispers on the Labour Benches, although I totally reject the implication that what is needed is not less but more of them.

Nothing more reveals the willingness of the Labour party to misread the harsh nature of present events than the accusation by the Leader of the Opposition in the House two weeks ago that the Government are "inventing recessions abroad". The report of the Bundesbank—the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East will not feel that I am undermining his position in saying that I trust the Bundesbank's views on the German economy rather than his—is that the main reason for three successive quarters of negative growth in Germany is

"the international recession which is reflected in particularly low investment activity".

Perhaps the right hon. and learned Gentleman should think again. Inventing recessions? How does he explain unemployment in Germany of 3 million? Did we invent the fact that in the past three months, industrial production fell by more in the United States, in Japan and in Germany than it did in the United Kingdom? Did we invent the fact that there are economic problems across the world, from Stockholm to Sydney? Did we invent the comment on Japan by Russell Jones of Phillips and Drew? He said:

"There's no doubt in my mind that the manufacturing sector is in recession".

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): The right hon. Gentleman talks about inventions. Let us bring him to the facts. Do he and the Government take responsibility for the tens of thousands of people who have lost their houses? Does he take any responsibility for or feel any guilt about the 2·5 million people who have lost their jobs? Let him deal with the facts for which he is responsible.

Mr. Heseltine: We shall come to the policies that will affect those who have lost their jobs. The hon. Gentleman will welcome as much as I do the fact that houses are now beginning to sell and that the starts are 2 per cent. up.

The issue that we must recognise is that there is one particular reason why the world economy is especially difficult for this country. Britain's economy is one of the world's most dependent on exports. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East knows that Scotland alone exports more manufactured goods per head of population than do Germany, America or Japan. He knows that Britain exports a greater proportion of our gross national product than Japan does. If there is difficulty in the world economy, our economy will suffer disproportionately as a consequence. If all our principal overseas markets are sluggish, we cannot avoid the consequences at home.

The question that must concern us is the nature of the policies that we need to fight our way out of the present international difficulties. In stark contrast to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, let me set out the policies that are essential for us to fight our way out of our present position.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): When there are so many unmet needs in Britain and so many unemployed people who could meet those needs, why cannot the two be put together to create prosperity for the 1990s?

Mr. Heseltine: The reason is that, unlike the right hon. Gentleman's right hon. and hon. Friends, we are not prepared to direct labour, as all the most ineffective economies in the world have tried to do at some stage.

The question with which we must concern ourselves concerns the essential policies which we believe we must follow to fight our way out of our present circumstances. The first essential ingredient is that we must pursue the drive for competitiveness in every aspect of the domestic economy. That is critical in the battle to contain public expenditure, to reduce inflation, to keep interest rates under control, to attract inward investment, to stimulate new enterprise and to keep our tax rates competitive. Those economic policies are essential to our policies, as are those for improving education and training, and for the safeguarding of the environment.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East said that we were doing nothing. All that reveals is that he does not understand what must be done. During the past 16 months, interest rates have been cut eight times and inflation has fallen from 10·9 per cent. to 4·1 per cent. The contradiction in everything that the right hon. and learned Gentlemen says is displayed no more eloquently than in the words of the man who is something of a hero figure to the right hon. and learned Gentleman—Jacques Delors. He said that Britain is fast becoming a paradise for foreign investment. That is why, in spite of the world downturn, we have seen in recent months Toyota's announcement of further investment in Derbyshire bringing 3,000 more jobs, Nissan's additional £150 million in Sunderland and other inward investment projects from Kimberley Clarke on Humberside to Toshiba in Plymouth.

The objectives are clear. The question that we must debate today is how we are to achieve those objectives. To be fair to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, I do not think that he would have too much difficulty in accepting many of the priorities that I have listed. Nobody should be especially surprised about that. He is one of the few Labour Members who has served in a Government with a basic rate of 35p in the pound, a top rate of 98p in the pound, inflation running out of control at 27 per cent. and more days lost in strikes in just one month in the winter of discontent than were lost in the whole of last year. I understand that he is not leaping up and down to restore the record of a Government among whom he was prepared to serve without complaint.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's problem is that most of his right hon. and hon. Friends are positively enthusiastic to restore, piece by piece, the regime that Labour left behind in 1979. What is at issue this afternoon is not the debate across—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I very much hope that the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) will show a little more restraint.

Mr. Heseltine: What is at stake this afternoon is not the debate across the Floor of the House; it is in reality the debate within the Labour party and, even worse, the debate within the shadow Cabinet. On the one hand, we have the much vaunted prudence of the shadow Chancellor and on the other, the irresponsible extravagance of his shadow Cabinet colleagues.

I hear wherever I go that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has become a star attraction in the City. Lunch after lunch, dinner after dinner, the assurances flow. The prawns are consumed and there are soft shells, soft words and soft lights. Not a discordant crumb falls on to the thick pile. "All will be well," is the message that the right hon. and learned Gentleman conveys. "The shadow Cabinet? Don't you worry," is the message. "I've stitched them up."

The words are no sooner uttered than up pops the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), the shadow Secretary of State for Social Security, who said:

"If you took a poll on Labour's public expenditure commitments in the City, you would find it almost 100 per cent. against".

Think of the tragedy, Mr. Deputy Speaker. All those prawn cocktails for nothing. Never have so many crustaceans died in vain. With all the authority that I can command as Secretary of State for the Environment, let me say to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, "Save the prawns."

Mr. John Smith: I forgive the Secretary of State for not knowing that Monklands is not in Edinburgh. It was very revealing about Conservative attitudes to Scotland. *[Interruption.]* I hear the right hon. Gentleman asking his hon. Friend where it is. It is in Lanarkshire. However, I ought not to badger the right hon. Gentleman about his lack of knowledge of his country. While we are of divisions within parties, does the Secretary of State hold to the view expressed in his article in November 1989 in *The Times* that Britain should sign the social charter?

Mr. Heseltine: The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows full well that the matter was then negotiated brilliantly by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister *[Interruption.]* The Labour party has been duped on the social charter. Labour Members all know that the Germans want to export their high costs, that the French cannot resist the social charter because they have a socialist Government, and that other countries will not take any notice of it. The Labour party has been duped into signing up to that extravagant impost on our industrial economy.

I have to recognise that there is another lacuna in the dilemma that we on this side of the House face. Up to now I have discussed the unlikely hypothesis of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East being the Chancellor of the Exchequer should a Labour Government emerge. I assumed that we should enjoy the bespectacled geniality of the right hon. and learned Gentleman. But there is even dispute about that. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) tells us:

"Once we have a Scottish Parliament handling Scottish home rule affairs in Scotland, it is not possible for me to act as Minister of Health administering health in England and Wales."

At a stroke, the shadow Health Secretary—a Scot—is gone. By the same standards, the shadow Chancellor—a Scot—is gone; the shadow Trade and Industry Secretary—another Scot—is gone. All Scots, all gone. Never have I heard so convincingly and eloquently made the case for devolution.

Let us assume that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East survived the scenario sketched by the hon. Member for Livingston. The right hon. and learned Gentleman may think that he has trouble now, but in those circumstances his trouble would hardly have begun. Not a day passes when his protestations of economic constraint are not shot to pieces by his colleagues. As each Labour spokesman promises a new priority, urgent action, immediate initiative——

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Heseltine: No.

Each Labour spokesman has his own variant of a crash programme. That is exactly what it would be—the biggest crash programme in British economic history.

Let us look at the heart of the matter. Only two weeks ago, Labour's housing spokesman, the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) tried to cook the books by redefining public borrowing. He promised—his phrase was eloquent—a phased release of up to £8 billion of capital receipts, without, of course, increasing the public sector borrowing requirement. Consternation in the Opposition camp. Urgent telephone calls. But they were all abroad somewhere out there across the continent. Dramatic disruption of the grand tour. Then, before we knew where we were, the climbdown.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Heseltine: No. I am not giving way. In order that the hon. Gentleman does not get the quotation wrong, it might be helpful to provide the House with the quotation from *The Times* of 6 February this year in which he continued his saga of this phased release. He said:

"There is no plan to revise the PSBR. I was wrong. I withdraw it."

This is not really about the phased release of capital receipts. We have witnessed the phased release of the Opposition spokesman on housing. The whole House will wish to join me in saying, "Good luck, good fortune and goodbye."

Mr. Soley: I have the advantage over the Secretary of State of having the script available to me with the exact words. What I said, as the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir George Young) will tell him, was that there should be a phased release of capital receipts and that that would have an impact on the PSBR. That is precisely what I said. The interesting thing, as the hon. Member for Acton will agree, is that he went on to say that the Government were also keeping that very option under review.

Mr. Hesetine: *The Times* now joins the list, along with the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express* and *The Guardian*, of unprincipled misrepresentation of Labour's policies.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. A few moments ago, the Secretary of State wilfully and deliberately misquoted comments attributed to my hon. Friend the Member for

Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) who, with the benefit of his script, has corrected him. Should not the Secretary of State apologise to my hon. Friend?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I fear that that is a point of frustration, rather than a point of order. *[Interruption.]* Order. These are matters for debate, not for points of order.

Mr. Heseltine: Without taking issue with you, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is not frustrating me, it is frustrating them. All that I want to know is, if the transatlantic or trans-European phone calls produced a result, how much did they add to public expenditure as a consequence? Opposition Members cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Soley: I am willing to give the Secretary of State a copy of the script. I have the exact words, as taken down at the time. I am happy to give them to him either in half an hour or later. If I give them to him, will he give an apology to the House?

Mr. Heseltine: I am just old-fashioned: I believe what I read in *The Times*. I, the House and the country want to know what deal the hon. Gentleman did with the right hon. and learned member for Monklands, East. How much public expenditure was slid under the carpet which they thought that no one would see?

Mr. George Howarth: Apologise.

Mr. Heseltine: I had not intended to raise the matter, but as I hear the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. Howarth) interrupting from a sedentary position, I tell him to go back to Knowsley and look at Cantrill farm, as it once was. It was one of the great housing slums of Europe. It took a Tory Government to rescue it.

Mr. Howarth *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: I will not give way.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it not one of the conventions of the House—*[Interruption.]*—there are such things—that when a Member names another Member as part of a speech, he is willing to give way when requested to do so?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is certainly up to the hon. Member who has the Floor whether he gives way, but I am afraid that many of the common courtesies which we used to extend to each other in the House were forgotten a long time ago.

Mr. Heseltine *rose*——

Mr. George Howarth: At least because of you, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Secretary of State has learnt some courtesy. He mentioned Stockbridge village. Will he confirm that the Stockbridge Village Trust has been technically bankrupt for the past three years and that, without the guarantees which have been provided by the Labour council in Knowsley, it would have been in the hands of the receiver?

Mr. Heseltine: The Labour council of Knowsley begged me to rescue that estate. The hon. Member should never forget that the Abbey National and Barclays bank made it all possible.

If I may leave the junior spokesman for the environment, I should like to come to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould)—no slouch he, when it comes to egging up the public expenditure ante. Within the past few months, by his team alone we have been asked to support: local authority bids for an extra £2 billion a year; the full release of all those capital receipts; the unfettered discretion of local authorities to clobber the business rate payer.

That is just part of the hon. Gentleman's programme. Then there is the problem of renationalising the water industry. In the past few weeks—this is why there has been so much muttering on the Labour Back Benches—we have heard about the £1 billion so-called recovery package, about the £800 million that Labour wants to spend on training and the £50 million that it wants to spend on the national health service by cancelling private health insurance.

But hold on: not to be outdone, the hon. Member for Dagenham says that renationalising the water industry is a "priority" for Labour. What will all that cost—about £4 billion, just to get control of it. That will cost about four times the size of Labour's recovery package; five times the amount that it proposes to spend on training; and 80 times what it deems to be essential for the national health service. All for one purpose—to buy off the hard left of the Labour party. The consequence would be a return to the regime when Labour cut water investment. That was Labour's contribution to the environmental enhancement of that vital industry.

Before the day is out, the hon. Member for Dagenham will be back on his feet, defending the higher tax rate plans of the Labour party, which overnight would do more to destroy the housing market than any other single thing one could do.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I know that the Secretary of State can hardly wait for me to get to my feet. When I do so, I shall attack the Government's record on the recession—something which the right hon. Gentleman has so far notably failed to defend.

Mr. Heseltine: My colleagues and I tremble on our feet. I promise the hon. Gentleman that we shall all be here waiting for the great hour when the hon. Member for Dagenham flattens us. I confess that I had intended to go out to dinner tonight, but I shall not do so now.

I do not want to be unfair to the hon. Member for Dagenham. Why should he respect the shadow Chancellor's edict, when the leader of the Labour party designs policies over Luigi's pasta, late at night—economics bolognaise?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State has made it abundantly clear to me that he is not giving way.

Mr. Heseltine: I do not want to pretend that the Leader of the Opposition isolates himself from advice, to act alone. He does not act alone—he does it with the aid and assistance of some of Britain's leading economists, even if they are heavily disguised as journalists from the Galleries of the parliamentary Lobby.

There was the leader of the Labour party—wrestling with the twin complexities of national insurance on the one hand, and how to carve up the shadow Chancellor on the

[Mr. Heseltine]

other. Picture the scene. The Leader of the Opposition, fighting to prevent long strings of spaghetti from slipping through the prongs of his fork, while the minutiae of national insurance were slipping through the caverns of his mind.

Mr. Foulkes: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Heseltine *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. There are points of order.

Mr. Foulkes: In my constituency, the level of unemployment is more than 20 per cent. Is it therefore in order for the Secretary of State to give us nothing other than a music hall turn?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a point of order for the chair.

Mr. Heseltine: So, there we were, it was the politics of Bedlam—fork-twisting, head-spinning, mind-boggling—the right hon. Member for Islywn (Mr. Kinnock) firmly in charge. He would have been better employed wrestling with the damaging consequences of his tax policies on the national economy.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East is not that far apart from his leader on putting up tax rates. In a recent interview, David Frost put it to him that *The Economist* had pointed out that, under his proposals, Britain would have the highest tax rates for middle managers anywhere in the world. Quick as a flash, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East said, "Ah."—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"]—I paused because it is so awful that I had to check it before I read it. He said, by way of excuse, "Ah, what they took was not all the countries in the world; what they took were the G7 industrial countries."

So, there it is, on the record, staring us in the face. Put the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East in the Treasury and, as long as he can find some clapped-out, down-at-heel, fly-blown socialist economy with higher tax rates than we have in this country, he will be content to point his lawyer's finger and say that someone, somewhere is suffering more than we are.

The Opposition have the effrontery to come to the House and talk of job creation. They talk of better education. They did so when they were in government. They called for a great debate, which consisted of agonising over the collapse of education standards that the worst excesses of Labour's social engineering had delivered.

Twelve years ago, only one in eight of our young people went through higher education. Today, that figure is one in four and it is heading for one in three. The Government are investing £2·8 billion in training, enterprise and vocational education—that is two and a half times as much in real terms as was invested in the final year of the last Labour Government. In addition, the private sector is spending £20 billion on training its employees; exports are at an all time high; inflation is at 4·1 per cent., below the average of the European Community and that of the G7 countries. Interest rates are down by 4·5 per cent. in just over a year. We have some of the most competitive tax rates in the world and the lowest level of corporation tax in either the G7 countries or the European Community. All the Labour party can do is talk about taxing the rich, as though that will help the economy.

The Labour party does not understand that there is a whole generation of young people out there—the skilled, the talented and the enterprising—who need to believe that there is a future for them here, in Britain, where energy and initiative will be rewarded.

We want to see young teachers seek the initiative to assume responsibilities as head teachers. We want young engineers to believe that it is worth their while to be promoted to production managers. We want young doctors to stay and practice in Britain and aim for the privilege and reward of running our hospitals. We want young scientists to relish the opportunities to explore tomorrow's frontiers in our laboratories and research establishments.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for someone who is making a speech to the House to speak only to those on his Benches? Is this a leadership bid?

Mr. Heseltine: Why should I not speak to my own Benches? We are the governing party and we will stay that way because the Labour party is out of date, out of touch and out of office. We will keep them there.

Hon. Members: More, more.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It should be placed on record, for the benefit of the House and the people, that the Secretary of State at no time made any reference to those who are unemployed. He had no message and no excuses for them.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows better than that; that is not a point of order with which I can deal.

5.51 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The House has had some entertainment in the past half an hour. However, the Secretary of State did not in any way raise the level of the debate or people's understanding of the problems that now face the country. We should all give him some credit for what he did do, because he raised the morale of the Conservative party. Conservative Members are now feeling slightly less miserable than they have been in the past few weeks. However, that is an evanescent experience, because I do not believe that it will last very long.

The nation, having watched the right hon. Gentleman and the enthusiastic reception that he received, will be amazed. It will think what a splendid bid it was for the leadership of the Conservative party after it has lost the next election. However, I believe that the right hon. Gentleman has mistimed his brilliant assault upon the leadership of his party.

I want to consider the subject of the debate—the problem of massive unemployment, which is now the greatest problem that faces the country. I am glad that the Opposition motion concentrates precisely upon that problem, the tragedy of high unemployment.

The House should recognise that unemployment has not just been experienced in 1991-92—painful as that has been—but that it has been our continuing experience ever since the Conservative Government came to power in 1979. Unemployment rose from just over 1 million in 1979 to more than 3 million in January 1982—less than three years later. Unemployment stayed at more than 3 million in every January until 1988. That is evident from the Government's own official figures, which allow for all the careful savings that enabled them to pare down the official total. More than 3 million people were unemployed in every year from 1982 to 1988. Then we had a brief decline in unemployment when it fell to its lowest point of 1,680,000 in January 1990. Since then unemployment has gone up yet again and we are now having this debate against the background of 2,670,000 unemployed people at the count in January this year. Everyone in the House as well as the Government know that that figure will go up still further.

I will not say much about the misery caused by such continuing high unemployment. Everyone who is in touch with his own constituency knows what wreckage unemployment causes to the life and the domestic peace, happiness and security of every home that it visits. We know that millions of our people are experiencing that. In common with my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), the unemployment level in my constituency stands at more than 20 per cent.: one in five of the work force is unemployed. The unemployment rate has seldom been as high as that, but it has seldom been lower during the past 12 years of Conservative government. Such is the scale of misery with which we have to deal.

We all know that unemployment is the main cause of poverty among families—it always has been. We also know that it leads to an appalling loss of personal self-confidence, self-esteem and dignity. That is what unemployment inflicts upon countless individuals.

It is terribly wasteful to any country and any economy to allow 2·5 million people, who could be contributing to the growth of output and the creation of wealth, to stand reluctantly idle because their resources cannot be put to use. The fiscal cost of such a high level of unemployment is great. People out of work impose two burdens—if I can put it that way—on the Exchequer. The first is the tax forgone because they no longer contribute to national insurance or to any other form of taxation. Secondly, they inevitably have to draw upon the state for social benefit. It is calculated that every person currently unemployed costs about £8,000 a year in terms of tax forgone and benefits. We have 2·5 million unemployed and, according to my reckoning, that amounts to more than £20 billion a year. That is the cost of the scandal of 2·5 million unemployed.

The Government have been asked why we are in a recession. They answer, when they can turn their mind to the subject at all, that the problem is inevitable because they had to impose high interest rates upon the economy and squeeze its vitality to deal with the problem of inflation.

That is a partial explanation. The right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), the former Chancellor, has reflected upon his own experience. He now tells us that that inflation was caused by the deregulation of the financial institutions of the economy and the unexpected consequences of that deregulation. I am rather puzzled that the right hon. Gentleman was taken by surprise with his own policies. Anyone could have told him that inflation, in the sense of people borrowing, was getting out of hand. It was crazy when one considers the amount of indebtedness that was taken on by companies and, above all, private individuals. That indebtedness inflated demand to a point at which it could not be sustained. I should also say that, according to others who were not entirely happy with the performance of the right hon. Gentleman when Chancellor, it was his own absurd policy of shadowing the deutschmark and therefore failing to use interest rates in the way that they should have been used and at the right time, that led to the debacle.

I am convinced that the Government have felt obliged, in the confines of their policy, to impose deflation on us because of the appalling current account deficit on the balance of payments that we have suffered in recent years. In 1987, the last year in which things were reasonably all right and the Government were thinking competently and talking about an economic miracle and so on, the deficit was just over £4 billion. In 1988 it rose to £13·5 billion; in 1989 it went to £24·4 billion; by 1990 it was down to £15·2 billion; and in the last year it was just under £6 billion.

In a four-year period, the Government have managed to sustain a combined deficit of nearly £70 billion. It is the largest amount of indebtedness ever experienced in our history, in absolute amount and in terms of percentage of GDP. It is a shameful consequence of Conservative policies. The Government have no reason to feel happy about what has happened in the last year, because to reduce the deficit to a mere £6 billion in the midst of an appalling recession represents no achievement at all. Any further expansion of the economy would simply seriously reopen the gap.

The Government have offered no policies for dealing with the present crisis, except to say that they hope that, once inflation is down, the economy will spontaneously revive. There is no evidence of that happening. It might have a certain plausibility if real interest rates came down pari passu with a fall in the rate of inflation. But while the rate of inflation has fallen—from just under 11 per cent. to just over 4 per cent.—there has been no similar change in the rates of interest that bind and constrict the economy.

The reduction has been from 15 to 10·5 per cent., but the difference between the rate of inflation and the rate of interest is higher now in real terms than it was when interest rates were at their peak of 15 per cent. So I can see no prospect of a revival of any substance in the economy under the Government's present policies.

What measures are needed and what must be done in addition to any measures that have been suggested so far? My right hon. and hon. Friends are right to concentrate on the longer and medium-term problem of improving the supply side of the economy. We want better training and output from our education system and we must promote research and development in the economy, but those are longer-term measures, not the sort of actions that will have an appreciable effect on the unemployment situation or the economy in the short run.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) is correct to speak about the desirability of an investment-led recovery. If by that he means spending money on, for example, construction projects of all kinds, including a substantial house building programme—with housing that can be let at affordable rents for our citizens who are desperate for housing—and

[Mr. Peter Shore]

investment in roads and transport and other infrastructure, that can have an effect in the reasonably short term. Such programmes should be put into place and we should give a commitment to finance them. They are necessary not merely to save the construction industry from almost total collapse but to provide essential infrastructure services and housing for the many who are in desperate need.

Increased investment is essential to restore our manufacturing base, the collapse and erosion of which my right hon. and learned Friend the member for Monklands, East described well. If we are to get a revival of investment in manufacturing and industry generally, we must stimulate demand. Industry will not respond just to investment incentives such as tax allowances. Such action might have a marginal effect, but it will not have a substantial effect until demand picks up and employers, industrialists and captains of industry know that they can sell their current output. Until they can do that, they will not invest on the scale we need to rescue the economy. That is the heart of the problem.

The crucial question flowing from that analysis is where the demand will come from to trigger the investment we need. The demand can come from two sources. One is domestic consumption, and the other is foreign consumption. Either we shall get the demand from domestic consumption here at home, which means increasing consumer or public expenditure—if it is the second, that must have PSBR implications; we should not be frightened of that because it is what the country needs —or from foreign consumption.

In considering the latter, we face perhaps the most difficult problem of all, which is the competitiveness of the British economy. Can we, at the present rate of exchange and with our present interest rates, compete with our major competitors in Europe and elsewhere? I shall not make a long speech about the exchange rate mechanism.

Mr. Wareing: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, from the public expenditure point of view, the nation has many needs? Capital receipts could be released to enable local authorities to build houses and we could do much to improve our railways and infrastructure generally. That, in addition to my right hon. Friend's proposals, would be a way to increase demand in the economy.

Mr. Shore: My hon. Friend refers to the kind of programmes that I strongly recommend. But manufacturing industry is an important area and we must increase our capacity, range and competitiveness, which leads me to the forbidden subject of the exchange rate. No occupant of either Front Bench is prepared to be honest about the exchange rate. Once a country enters a system of fixed exchange rates, nobody will speak the truth about the exchange rate. That is why we on the Back Benches are free, and have a duty, to see that important questions about that are discussed.

I do not expect any comment on the subject from either Front Bench, but I put it to the House that if we entered at the right exchange rate in October 1990, it is not right now. If DM2.95 was the right rate in October 1990—I have not seen convincing evidence to show that it was; it was consistent with an external current account deficit of about £15 billion, which was unsustainable—it cannot be right now. During the three years 1989 to the end of 1992, the German industrial economy will have grown by well over 25 per cent. while Britain's economy will have declined in terms of overall investment by not less than 9 per cent. Those figures show how the increased competitiveness of Germany and how our own declining competitiveness affect us.

Although I do not believe that interest rates and exchange rates are the absolute arbiters of policy, we shall not escape from the present deep recession until we are prepared to pluck the nettle and lower our interest rates in the knowledge that that will, if necessary, force us out of the exchange rate mechanism or force us to change our exchange rate within that mechanism. That is an essential ingredient in a total strategy for success.

6.10 pm

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) and to listen to his characteristically interesting and illuminating remarks. But it is an even greater pleasure to remind the House that this is an Opposition Supply day. My extraordinary observation is that this is supposed to be a day when the Opposition pick a subject on which they feel that the Government are most vulnerable. Having listened to the contributions from the two Front Benches, I do not think that many people will be left in any doubt that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment put on a superb performance. His speech was as peppered with amusing anecdotes as the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), whose contributions I always enjoy. I was very taken with university debating societies and it is good to see that tradition continued in the House.

The unruly behaviour, however—in which I would have no part, Madam Deputy Speaker—may have arisen from the Conservative Benches because of the unique failure of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East to answer any of the direct questions put to him by my right hon. and hon. Friends. In the course of the next few minutes, in what I hope will be a quieter atmosphere, I shall repeat some of those questions so that the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) can think about answering them when he winds up.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman usually addresses the House on home affairs, but I am anxious to hear his comments on the economy.

Mr. Randall: Although we heard an entertaining speech from the Secretary of State for the Environment, there is a serious point to be made. Many people will have been watching the debate on television. They will include people who are unemployed, who have had their homes repossessed, and who have lost their businesses. They will wonder what on earth is going on in the House of Commons when there are so many problems outside, so there are two sides to the coin.

Mr. Norris: In the next few minutes I intend to follow the line that the hon. Gentleman has just taken. I shall offer my contribution as a small business man—one who

has been in business for himself on and off for the past 20 years. Others will no doubt wish to contribute to the debate from their own perspectives.

I am happy to acknowledge that the Government, in the wake of the 1987 stock market correction—it was called a crash at the time, but we all know that it was a correction—pulled the levers of demand too hard. I supported the Government, as did my right hon. and hon. Friends, because we desperately wanted to avoid a crisis of confidence—a recession, sadly—and in doing so it is clear that we over-ignited the flames of demand. The consequences of that were very sad.

I merely make two observations. The most salient one, which should oft be repeated, is that Opposition Members urged us at that time to take even more fierce action to ensure that demand was maintained. Now that the House is quieter, I can say that it is also clear beyond peradventure that conditions in world markets have now exacerbated a situation which faced this country just at the point when we would otherwise have been beginning to come out of recession. The evidence of what is happening in the United States has already been felt by the British car market, for instance. Evidence of what is going on in Germany was cited by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

I therefore have no qualms about accepting the full share of moral responsibility for the present position of the British economy. I see no point is pulling over entrails to determine the proportions of such responsibility, particularly in view of the evident collusion and strong endorsement of the Opposition.

Furthermore, I deeply resent the implication in the remarks of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) that only the Opposition care about the unemployment consequences of the recession. I know of no Conservative Member who believes that one unemployed person is a desirable feature of any economy. One unemployed person is one too many, one failed business is one too many, and we have seen too many of both those individual tragedies. Business failures are tragedies in themselves. They are as regretted as sad news, and as desperately disappointing to my hon. Friends as they are to Opposition Members. They are the sad and inevitable price that is paid for the brave action that the Government took when they recognised that the levers of demand had been pulled too hard and the economy was overheating.

Although the Government took brave, draconian action which hurt, it has had, beyond any doubt, the desired effect in re-establishing the essentials for recovery and growth in the 1990s, such as low inflation and the best record of employment losses through strikes for the past five decades.

Mr. Gould: I do not intend to intervene frequently, but I am listening with great interest to what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Although I would reach a different conclusion about the beneficial consequences of the policy that he describes, I am entirely with him in his description of the sequence of events and the causal connection between those events. How does his analysis square with the case made by the Secretary of State for the Environment a moment ago, when he said that the recession had nothing to do with mistakes of economic policy made by the Government?

Mr. Norris: I have a clear impression of the exchanges between the two Front Benches. The Opposition absolutely refused to recognise that international conditions have an impact on Britain's economy. That is patently absurd. It would be unrealistic to attempt to discharge the Government of their share of responsibility for the present economic conditions. That is so beyond peradventure as to be hardly worthy of debate.

The crucial point is that we are now faced with a choice. For the British economy we have a choice between two paths into the 1990s. I have a message for any potential elector, of whatever age or income. Some people believe that one can make the poor richer by making the rich poorer. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East called it redistribution, but we know what it means. What of those people who bother to drag themselves up and make a success of their lives, who start businesses which create genuine employment? Some believe that, by so doing, such people become class enemies, and some believe—this is crucial—that there is credibility in the idea that raising personal taxes is the way out of recession. Anyone who believes any of those three fundamental adages should vote Labour at the next election. That is what the Labour party is offering, and it is no more and no less than the politics of envy.

The reality is quite the opposite. Higher personal taxes simply deter consumer confidence. People have less money to spend and the expectation of still less spending power, and they refrain from doing the one thing that needs to be done if we are to emerge from recession—namely, spend. Such a situation destroys the housing market. Hon. Gentlemen opposite are good at telling us how many jobs there are in construction.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): And hon. Ladies.

Mr. Norris: Yes, the ladies are just as guilty as the men.

If Opposition Members do not see the inevitable consequences of higher personal taxes for the housing market and, therefore, for the construction industry, they are blind to the obvious realities.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Norris: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way. As you, Madam Deputy Speaker, have pointed out, time is limited.

Let us consider the effect of higher taxes on pensioners, on people who during their working lives saved for the purpose of enhancing their retirement incomes. Why should significant additional burdens be imposed on those people? Why should such people be condemned for putting all their effort into the accumulation of a small capital sum? Why should they be driven to the conclusion that it was never worth while, that they should never have bothered, that thrift was never the right policy, that there is a distinct disincentive to save and provide wealth for investment in this country?

The ludicrous minimum wage policy that the Opposition offer as a way out of recession would also be disastrous for the British economy. There can now be no doubt that a national minimum wage would only raise overall unit costs and add to inflation. A minimum wage is wonderful in theory, but utterly impractical. That is accepted by Conservative Members and, as I believe

[Mr. Norris]

Opposition Members know, even the Fabians have pointed out time without number that the minimum wage would be a recipe for disaster for the British economy.

Then there is the whole matter of the extent to which the Labour party is obliged by those who pull its own levers to relax the reform of trade union law that the Government, over a considerable number of years and with a great deal of effort, have put in place. Our industrial relations record is at its best for five decades. That being the case, we should not be thinking about a return to the old chaos—the old business of half Britain being on strike at any one time. In those days, one could count strikes by the dozen. I was about to refer to counting them on one's fingers, but perhaps I should rephrase that as it would have taken far more than the available digits to count the strikes on any day anywhere in Britain.

I wish to refer to another consequence of the policies of the Labour party. This is something that matters a great deal to me. Spirit, entrepreneurship and initiative constitute the germ of business and the creation of new jobs. People starting businesses do what such people have always had to do—that is, risk probably most of what they have ever built up during their working lives. They may have to secure second mortgages on their homes. They often have to work seven days a week rather than five; they are the last out through the door at the end of the day, the ones who switch off the lights; they are the ones who check the quality of every item leaving the factory; and they are the people who, year in and year out, are unable to take holidays. In this country there are many thousands of such people. But a person can be asked to make those sacrifices only if he is offered the prospect of the ability to enjoy his success.

The Opposition's case rests on the desperate fallacy that, somehow, such people are class enemies rather than people on which the whole future of our economy depends. Entrepreneurs must be allowed to enjoy the fruits of their success, of all their effort and their risk. That is something that the Labour party has never understood. No party with any understanding of how business operates could ever propose raising taxes as a way out of recession and conducting a kind of class warfare, which is not only desperately out of date but also desperately inappropriate to this country at present.

We have the lowest corporation taxes of all the G7 countries, and we have our best strike record for five decades. Conservatives are committed to lower personal taxes and lower corporation taxes because we genuinely want to encourage investment. But what we want is real investment, not the state-directed picking of winners. That is the disastrous policy that the Labour party adopted in the 1970s.

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): It failed.

Mr. Norris: Yes, it failed significantly.

What we want is real investment. We want to encourage reward. We want to encourage success and entrepreneurship. We want to encourage risk-takers. Anyone in business, contemplating going into business, or even working for a small or medium-sized business, should look at the choices on offer in the forthcoming general election. Such people ought to say no to the politics of envy. They should say yes to the party of entrepreneurship, the party that wants the British economy to grow, the party that wants a successful outcome in the 1990s. I am convinced that, as the general election programme unfolds, ordinary men and women will realise increasingly the wisdom of that conclusion.

6.27 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick upon Tweed): The hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) gave a very graphic and accurate description of the life of small businessmen, the risks that they take, and the anxieties and burdens that they have to bear. He seemed to want to give the impression that the entire small business community, despite its difficulties during the recent recession, is generally weathering the situation remarkably well and can afford to look with enthusiasm to another period of similar government.

The reality is so dreadfully different. The hon. Gentleman talked about people who switch the lights on in the morning and are the last out at night, people who have risked their savings and, as many have second mortgages tied up with their businesses, their homes. Those are the people who are going bankrupt at a record rate. They are experiencing business failure on a scale that this country has never seen before. Incidentally, it is not they who are paying out large amounts of income tax and corporation tax, as the return on their investment is currently so low, but they are the people who have to find the uniform business rate. They have been taxed at a ludicrous level because of the Government's decision, in successive years, to pitch the uniform business rate at the highest legally permissible level. Why do the Government, who are supposedly concerned about small business, pitch the uniform business rate at the maximum that they have legally permitted themselves to do, and then claim that, if the matter were in the hands of local government, business would pay far more? What a ludicrous proposition that is.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): Am I correct in saying that the Liberal party has proposed giving local authorities the power to impose a business rate based on land values? Is that not a recipe for disaster for employment figures in places such as Lambeth and Liverpool?

Mr. Beith: No, it is not. If the hon. Gentleman wants to talk about local government finance and the sort of measures that we would take to help districts such as Liverpool, so long as they were properly run and not run as they have been during much of the past decade, I can explain how those measures would not prove disastrous. Land values in much of Liverpool have been at a relatively low level for fairly obvious reasons. One thing that does not make sense, however, is to pitch the business rate at the highest level legally permitted when there is a crisis among small businesses, which is what the Government have done.

The Secretary of State for the Environment seems to have brought forward his dinner engagement so that he can return in time to hear the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) and is no doubt trying to digest his prawns so that he can enjoy the hon. Gentleman's speech later.

I know why the Chancellor did not speak in today's debate. It was for the very good reason that he was appearing before the Treasury Select Committee, answering questions about why this country is committed to the cohesion fund of European monetary union while

not actually committed to joining the monetary union. British taxpayers will pay for the convergence exercise that must take place, even if the country is not to enjoy the benefit of being in the monetary union. The Chancellor had a job to do.

I do not understand why the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry was replaced by the Secretary of State for the Environment, but I can think of a reason. The Secretary of State for the Environment squashed the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry out of sight on the subject of RECHAR and European funds. The Secretary of State for the Environment told the Government that they would have to climb down on that issue and, ultimately, they did. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for the Environment for making his views known both within and, eventually, outside Government. I represent a coal mining district which has suffered all the consequences of the decline in the industry. We need that money, and I am glad that a deal has been struck between the Government and the European Community on that issue.

Mr. Hind: The hon. Gentleman commented on why the Secretary of State for the Environment led for the Government. Perhaps in years to come he will be grateful to him for introducing a new concept of Labour policy —economics bolognaise—a phrase that may live with us for many years.

Mr. Beith: I do not think that that phrase will be what anyone from among the unemployed and homeless who heard or took notice of the Secretary of State's speech will remember. They will remember the Secretary of State reducing Conservative Back Benchers to gales of delighted laughter by his oratorical skills.

The Secretary of State did not apply any of his energies to developing policies that could give homes and jobs to the people so desperately in need of them. That was the action of a Secretary of State who is known to have a genuine interest in shifting the direction of Government policy towards a more interventionist role than that favoured by the former Prime Minister. As a spending Minister, the Secretary of State is also responsible for local authority funds, which are currently tied up but which could be spent on building houses.

The Secretary of State seemed more interested in what —if they will forgive me for calling them this—obscure Members of the Labour Front Bench team may or may not have said about housing capital receipts, than he was about directing those capital receipts towards reinvesting in our housing stock, which is what matters to people who are not homeless. They are concerned not with what the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) may or may not have said, but about whether money from local authority bank accounts will flow into building and repairing houses, and provide jobs in the construction industry. That is what the economy needs now.

Unemployment increased by 53,000 last month and has increased by 713,000 over the year. Yesterday's figures on long-term unemployment showed the largest rise for 10 years. The output figures published on Friday show that output is no higher than it was at the last election. After almost five years of the most recent Conservative Administration, and the boom and bust cycle, we are back where we were. Manufacturing output fell by 5 per cent. between 1990-91. In the last quarter of 1991, total output fell yet again. Are those figures explained by a world recession? Of course they are not.

A world recession makes it much harder for us to get out of the recession that we entered long before some other parts of the world. It makes the problem more difficult for any Government, but it strengthens the argument for the Government to take anti-recession steps and to develop anti-recession policies. An export-led recovery will not come easily when other countries are also experiencing economic difficulties. Some of the difficulties experienced by those countries look like benefits compared with what we have been through in the past couple of years.

In the rest of the Community, gross domestic product has still risen, while in this country it has fallen by 2·5 per cent. In France it has grown by 1·4 per cent. Italy's GDP is growing. Japan's GDP has been slowing down, but it still grew by about 4·5 per cent. in 1991. If those are problems, they are problems that we in this country would prefer to the experience that we have suffered in the past couple of years. Forecasts for the future show the outlook for Britain to be far worse than that for other countries.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I should alert the hon. Gentleman to one of his own party's proposals, which is hardly likely to advance Britain's economic recovery. I believe that the Liberal Democrats are committed to swingeing increases in the price of petrol, which will hit all people, including business people in rural districts such as his constituency, the constituency of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and my own constituency. I believe that the right hon. Member for Yeovil has also proposed drastic increases in energy taxes. Surely that would have a crippling effect on industry. How can the hon. Gentleman justify those proposals?

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman should read what Ministers have said on the subject—for example, what the chairman of the Conservative party said when he was Secretary of State for the Environment. He said that energy prices would have to rise. If the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) thinks that increases of 10p per year over a period of four years represent swingeing increases in the price of petrol, and if he refuses to take into account the extent to which we—unlike the Government —intend to channel resources into rural districts which might be affected more adversely than urban districts, he fails to understand what is happening in terms of environmental policies. He might be surprised at what the Government have in store, were they to be in office much longer.

The hon. Gentleman interrupted me at an early stage in my argument when I was seeking to relate how the recession came about and the way in which it was fuelled by the Government. The hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) was honest enough to admit that the Government cannot absolve themselves of the blame for the recession, but he did not go into that part of the blame relating to the way in which the Government deliberately stimulated the economy to an extent that was bound to lead to debt on a scale that is now protracting the recession. It is the experience of recession and the debts that people incurred during it that makes them so unwilling to rush into shops and create the consumer-led recovery that the Government said would be the way to emerge from the recession.

[Mr. Beith]

Ministers are now beginning to make some admissions about what has happened. The right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) has admitted that the authorities in this country, including the present Prime Minister, greatly underestimated the demand effect that deregulation—a supply side reform—would have. We know what happened: at one and the same time, the Government presided over substantial deregulation—making capital much easier to borrow—promised tax cuts later in the year, thus leading people to believe that it would be safe to get into debt, and told people that if they wanted to buy a house in London they should do so in the next few months as there would never be such a time for tax relief. They made tax changes on that basis. The combined effect of those actions was a dramatic credit boom, within which lies the cause of many of the problems and the extent of the present recession. The Government mercilessly fuelled the recession.

With the economy so deep in recession, Britain needs a programme that recognises the urgent need to get the economy going and reduce unemployment. There is little room for using interest rates, due to the importance of the exchange rate mechanism in anti-inflation policy, so one is left with a choice between cutting taxes or increasing public expenditure to get the economy going again. All the signs are that the Government's approach will be to try to achieve that aim through income tax cuts. We do not believe that that is the most efficient approach. Income tax cuts take time to come through and the people who gain by tax cuts may use the money—understandably—to repay their debts and not to engage in the consumer boom that the Government hope will get us out of recession.

Income tax cuts only increase the spending power of those in work—not those relying on the state pension or those who are unemployed. Nor is it financially prudent to fund income tax cuts by public borrowing. It would be most irresponsible to increase public borrowing in the Budget in order to fund tax cuts. When Britain desperately needs investment-led recovery, Liberal Democrats do not think it responsible to concentrate scarce public resources on attempting to foster an unlikely consumption-led recovery.

As for Labour's approach, there are signs that it has been criticised from within as timid and that key changes will have to be phased. That was indicated some time ago after the Leader of the Opposition's slightly confused comments about Labour's tax plans. He said that if the tax changes were to be phased, perhaps increased pensions and benefits would also have to be phased. There is an air of extreme caution, born of a desire to live down the reputation gained by earlier Labour Governments, and the caution may be so great that it leaves Labour offering no better option for an investment-led recovery than the Government. It will be interesting to see how much borrowing the Government engage in. If Labour comes up with a figure before the Government, they may find that in the end the Government have a higher PSBR than they would have had.

The other great weakness of Labour's position so far is that it lacks the anti-inflation policy which is necessary to accompany the investment measures set out in the motion. That is why we sought to amend the motion by adding the anti-inflation buttress which we believe would best be provided by an independent central bank. It is a mistaken charge for the Government to lay against the Labour party that its proposals would deepen recession. I do not believe that they would, although they might have some effect on the beginning of recovery from recession. The danger is that they might restart inflation if not accompanied by a firm anti-inflation policy.

Labour has other proposals, such as the one-off increase in capital allowances to 100 per cent., which sounds a good idea, but on examination they do not seem likely to have all that great an effect. I would favour providing a consistent taxation environment for business—for example, by indexing the corporation tax allowance so that business could plan in the knowledge of its corporation tax commitment if earnings increased.

If we are to cut taxes, one of the best places to aim tax cuts might be at business, and particularly small business, by cutting the uniform business rate and business rates in Scotland. That would improve liquidity for every business and there would be an immediate cash flow improvement. At the same time, we could get rid of some of the silly restrictions in the uniform business rate transition relief scheme—such as the fact that relief is attached to property and not to the business, thus discouraging businesses from moving premises when that might be one of the best ways for them to cut costs in response to the recession.

Liberal Democrats believe that the most effective way out of the recession would be through a large-scale programme of capital investment and training measures over the next two to three years. Such a programme would boost confidence throughout the economy, reducing the fear factor which worries so many firms and people. It would help the troubled construction industry, enabling firms to continue in business and to expand their labour forces. It would enable British Rail to go ahead with the plans already drawn up to modernise and electrify more routes. It would enable many councils to start on projects for major and minor repairs to schools and housing stock. Health authorities would be able to implement improvements to hospital buildings which they have been wanting to make for years. There would be employment and export opportunities in the major energy conservation programme and the programme to develop our skills in energy efficiency.

Perhaps even more importantly, such projects have to be carried out if Britain is to be more competitive in the long term. The Secretary of State said much about Britain's competitiveness, but too little about how important some measures are to secure that competitiveness in future. We need investment in our infrastructure and more efficient use of energy, backed by a firm anti-inflation policy.

I noted that the Secretary of State quoted the Bundesbank a lot. I was interested to hear the deputy president of the Bundesbank calling on Britain yesterday to speed up moves to create an independent central bank to

"ensure adequate prior familiarisation with the new structures of decision making".

He was warning the British Government that they should understand their commitment that if they go into the monetary system they will accept an independent central bank. Alongside that, there must be a genuine commitment to free enterprise and to a free market economy.

I was very struck by the fact that the UBS Phillips and Drew economic briefing published on Monday last week said of the Liberal Democrats' economic programme, part of which I have outlined:

"Of the economic programmes on offer, theirs is easily the most logically argued and the most sensibly radical."

Looking forward to a balanced Parliament, and considering the possibility of a minority Government, the review said:

"For economic performance the better outcome would involve power sharing in which the Liberal Democrats pressed home their sensibly radical economic programme—enhancing the best features of the Conservatives' policies or limiting the possible damage of Labour's".

That was a sensible and wise judgment.

In the light of the unemployment and misery which stalks so much of the country, we must offer the people some hope. Without an investment programme for jobs, backed by a programme to beat inflation, the Government are offering no hope to the unemployed millions, no prospect of improvement and therefore no basis for recovery.

6.46 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) is always heard with respect in the House. He made a serious contribution to the debate, unlike the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). We take issue with him on energy costs and on the idea that businesses would be better off if local authorities were free to determine their own business rates, but I shall return to that shortly.

With regard to the prospects of the Liberals influencing policy if there were a hung Parliament, I reflected with sadness on the time when the Liberals tried to influence the policy of the Labour Government during the Lib-Lab pact. I am afraid that the Government of Lord Callaghan and the right hon. Members for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) and Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) had the Liberals for breakfast, if we are pursuing the admirable gastronomic parallel of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) made the point that, probably in a few weeks' time, the electors will have to choose between alternative policies to govern the country. Electors are irritated by the badinage across the Floor of the House, which was particularly marked earlier today during the two Front-Bench speeches.

In the approach to the February 1974 election I was in a position to observe matters as a party back-room boy. Possibly because there was a big miners' strike which diverted attention from politics, I do not believe that the Conservative party warned the electorate adequately in those months about what a Labour Government would mean.

My hon. Friends may remember that Labour was elected to power without a majority in the House and with 1 per cent. less of the electorate voting for it than voted for the Conservative party. If we had properly warned the electorate of what the policies of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and his right hon. Friends would inflict on the country in 1974, 1975 and 1976, I suspect that we might have tilted the balance and retained power. My God, would not the country have been a better place and would not the economy have been better if we had done that.

So I fear that the electors must put up with our analysis of Labour's alternative policies. For myself, I am content to rest with what I think we all agree was a brilliant speech by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. He certainly dealt with most of the main weaknesses in Labour's programme for Britain's future. I intend therefore to speak mainly about certain matters affecting my constituency and about policies for getting out of the recession.

The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) referred to manufacturing industry and the trade imbalance. He may recall that before I arrived in this House I worked for the Association of British Chambers of Commerce which took a great interest in those matters and, in the early to mid-1980s, was critical of various aspects of Government policy on manufacturing industry, the state of our trade and our trade balance. It is therefore with some relief that I can refer to exchanges that took place during Treasury oral questions on 16 January.

In the first of these exchanges, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary pointed out that United Kingdom exports have grown by 23 per cent. in the past five years and reached record levels during 1991. In December 1991, export volumes, excluding oil and erratics, were the highest on record. My right hon. and learned Friend also pointed out that after decades of decline the United Kingdom's share of world trade in manufactures flattened out in the mid-1980s, just after the time when my previous employers were issuing their warnings to the Government, and then increased in 1989 and 1990—and are expected to have increased again in 1991. That is a remarkable achievement at a time when this country was in economic difficulty.

The other important figures in the exchanges at oral questions emerged in a reply to a question from me to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury. She pointed out that in 1988 and in 1989 62 per cent. of all United States inward investment in the European Community came to the United Kingdom and that 42 per cent. of all Japanese direct investment in the Community came to the United Kingdom. I believe that the figures for 1990 will show that investment from the United States and Japan came here in proportions of 60 and 50 per cent. respectively. That, too, is a remarkable achievement for a country experiencing economic difficulty.

The achievement of the Prime Minister in negotiating at Maastricht an agreement that would protect industry and employment from the social charter and the other horrors that some in the European Community and all the Labour party want to inflict on us has helped to promote the prospect of more inward investment to this country.

Turning to my constituency, I am pleased to see that, following the movement last autumn of the Treasury Solicitors's property division and the Charity Commissioners' southern regional office to Taunton with several hundred employees, the construction of headquarters for Western Provident Association, health insurers, is going ahead on the Blackbrook business site. The firm has already begun to recruit locally. Inquiries for the Blackbrook business site, which is under construction, have come from the service sector—Taunton is strong in services—and also from manufacturers from other parts of the country.

At Chelston, outside Wellington, where there has been a business park for more than a year, there are now 300 jobs. Developments are also just beginning at Dellers

[Mr. David Nicholson]

wharf in Taunton, most of the site having been cleared in the past six months. It is also awaiting the start of construction of a Safeway food store and other shops, and a housing development.

I take this opportunity to warn those responsible for planning in my local authority and in similar authorities not to depend too much on the retail sector. In the past Taunton has been rather heavily dependent on that sector and a number of large retail developments are in the pipeline, but we have seen during the past few years what can happen when there is a slump in retail purchasing. If, God forbid, fashions should change and people no longer wanted to shop in Taunton, there would be a further problem. I want a diversified local economy, which is why I welcome the movement of professional jobs that I have already mentioned.

It is estimated that the various developments to which I have referred have provided 700 jobs in Taunton and Wellington; unemployment, which, in the travel-to-work area in January was slightly more than 3,400 or 6·6 per cent., would have been more than 4,000 had those developments not taken place. I pay tribute to all involved in them. They have rendered Taunton's unemployment rate well below the regional average in the south-west, which is 9·1 per cent.

I move on to various matters which I believe are relevant to the Chancellor's forthcoming Budget. The policy of the Liberal party on this matter notwithstanding, Conservative Members expect some reduction in personal taxation. I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary on the Treasury Bench. There is a perfectly good reason for wanting to reduce personal taxes: a reduction would help to encourage and restore consumer spending. It is one of the ways in which this country can move out of recession. I would prefer the reductions to come from a raising of thresholds, not from a reduction in the basic rate, but we have had debates on that. I now want to move on to certain other proposals.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed mentioned business rates. I do not think that many Conservative Members would like to return to each local authority setting its own business rate, but I know that Treasury Ministers already acknowledge that the revaluation, which was necessary and which had been disgracefully postponed by Governments of both parties, has, despite phasing, caused crippling damage to a number of businesses—especially small businesses and small shops, and particularly in the south.

I know that there is a lot of pressure on the Chancellor to provide in his Budget some relief from business rates. The simplest way of providing that relief would be a cut in the poundage, but that would mean the benefit going to businesses of all kinds, including many which benefited from the revaluation and the introduction of a uniform business rate—for example, businesses in areas which used to have high rates. If we are really aiming to bring relief where the boot hurts most—I realise that that may be administratively difficult—we should direct it to the businesses whose rate increases have been most dramatic in recent years.

I echo a point made by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed: can we not do something about businesses that want to move premises? At present they do not benefit from the phasing, which is one reason why there are so many unoccupied shop premises and offices. I hope that this can be dealt with in the Budget, because the problem represents one way in which the business rate pinches hard.

Small firms in my constituency complain a great deal about bank charges—having to pay for paying in cheques and so on. Some of the banks' policies are just an irritant, but others affect businesses' ability to compete and survive.

I note that the *Financial Times* of 29 January reports a survey of 30 managers carried out by Birmingham polytechnic which suggests that bank managers, when assessing business proposals, pay too much attention to narrow financial criteria and not enough to factors such as management skills and technical knowledge.

The Forum of Private Business, which has many members in my constituency and carries out regular surveys of those members, not only on business expectations but on policy matters, has addressed the policy of the banks. In a statement issued on 21 January 1992, it said:

"There is still a gulf of misunderstanding and fear between borrowing businesses and their banks . . . With . . . a third of businesses still taking the risk of growing out of recession, it is tragic that . . . the codes"—

which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has encouraged the banks to produce—

"have missed these real 'life and death' issues".

The Forum of Private Business then marks the banks according to its own assessment based on the experience of small businesses. The exception to which great praise is given is the Royal Bank of Scotland, whose charter for business customers received an 82 per cent. rating. I do not want to mention the important national banks because I have accounts with one or two of them myself, but I assure the House that their ratings were well below 82 per cent. Two of them were rated as 63 per cent. effective and one disappointed greatly, being only 33 per cent. effective.

Mr. Stan Mendham of the Forum of Private Business said:

"we are pleased that the banks have yielded to our long-standing call for invoicing for charges. But unfathomable bank charges have been more a cause for resentment than a threat to survival. The biggest threat to small businesses . . . has been bank-imposed restraints on borrowing—at a time when small businesses need financial support to see them through"

The Forum of Private Business went on to say:

"Of 33 per cent. of businesses reporting a tougher attitude from their banks in the past six months, one in five said this took the form of removal, reduction, or refusal of borrowing, or increased interest rates."

We understand why the banks are in difficulties and, regrettably, have to impose burdens on business. I hope that those burdens can now be lessened and that the Government will do what they can to encourage that process. That leads on to a matter that I raised at Prime Minister's questions about a year ago. I remember, as will my hon. Friends, that three or four years ago the lending institutions encouraged businesses and personal borrowers to borrow in the most irresponsible way.

When I first purchased property, I was subject to a restriction of two and a half times my income and about 70 per cent. of the value of the property. We all know that ridiculous 100 per cent. loans were available at four and five times people's incomes. That was why the property market fell into such extraordinary difficulties, the down

side of which has hit the construction industry so badly during the past year and, I fear, will continue to do so. The same was seen with lending to businesses, including farming businesses in my constituency.

We have debated the Government's role in that situation through their low interest rate policy in 1987 and 1988 and their perhaps rather delayed response to the great credit boom. Everyone in property and retail was enjoying that boom, but few pointed out that it might end in tears, as it did.

Therefore, as the Conservative party produces its Budget and election manifesto, I hope that it will reassure the electorate that we have learned from these experiences in credit control and credit borrowing in recent years which have led to the difficulties of high interest rates which, happily, in the past year have been falling. We move into the next few months on the basis of lower inflation, much lower interest rates, and lower personal taxation compared with the past and compared with many of our competitors, and the best strike record for 60 years. That is a situation in which I am content for us to go to the country and ask for a further term of office.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The Standing Order limiting speeches to 10 minutes now comes into operation.

7.3 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): This debate on the recession and unemployment is timely because it comes immediately after the devastating blows that were showered on the British economy a few days ago.

Last Thursday, the unemployment figures revealed an increase of 122,000 to more than 2·6 million of the working population. That was the 22nd consecutive monthly increase. For such a trend to continue unabated over such a long period suggests inertia on the part of the Government. Today, any Government has immeasurable control over the economic levers of power. However, the Government have chosen not to act and appear to be holding up their hands and saying that that is not their responsibility.

On Monday, in a statement, the highly respected chairman of the Rover motor company, Mr. George Simpson, protested about the Government's failure to support industry. How right he was. The Government's laissez-faire approach is no good. It is no good for the unemployment that we are now experiencing which is causing considerable social despair. The lives of individuals, their families and whole communities are badly affected. Even Scotland Yard has recognised the link between social conditions, such as unemployment, and crime.

Significantly, unemployment is not now confined to the so-called blue collar sector. People with professional qualifications have been equally badly hit. Likewise, the loss of jobs has not been concentrated in the traditional areas of high unemployment, such as Scotland, Wales and the north of England. If anything, the south-east of England has been even more badly hit.

Some of our major companies have been badly affected. For example, the Ford motor company has just announced an all-time record loss of £590 million. Coupled with that comes the news of redundancies in its plants throughout the country. A redeeming feature of that company is that its investment in manufacturing facilities in the United Kingdom has been maintained. Last year it totalled some £500 million. Those figures reveal the importance of that company to the well-being of the British economy.

Two of Ford's plants are in Wales, at Bridgend and Swansea. In recent years, Wales has suffered badly from closures and redundancies. Traditional industries such as coal and steel have been badly affected and the last thing that we need now is a loss of jobs in the relatively new industries. In fact, certainly in Wales, there is a crying need for new investment and new jobs.

Unemployment in Wales is now 123,600—9·5 per cent. of the working population. It is worth putting on record a list of companies that have recently announced redundancies. They include the British Steel Corporation, British Aerospace, Allied Steel, Ford motor company, British Petroleum, Ferranti, Marconi, Ferodo, National Power, Trecwn and Brawdy, the military establishments in Pembroke, Royal Worcester, Christie Tyler and South Wales Electricity. The list is endless, but wage levels in Wales are reckoned to be the lowest in the United Kingdom. There is a moral there somewhere.

The bad news about the recession and unemployment has continued unabated. A week ago, BP announced massive losses. British Aerospace is to make redundant 2,500 skilled workers. What a waste. The CBI reports a sharp fall in manufacturing demand and output in all regions during the past four months. Even the Bank of England has had to reverse its earlier prediction that the economy was moving out of recession. Bankruptcies are at a record level. Home repossessions and mortgage arrears are at record levels, with 75,000 repossessions in 1991 and all the misery and unhappiness that that involves.

On top of that, there was the announcement of an increase of 10 per cent.—more than double the inflation rate—in prescription charges. That is a direct act by the Government. The charge for a single prescription now stands at £3·75; in 1979, when Labour left office, the charge was 20p. What price now the glib assertion by the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), when she was Prime Minister, that the national health service was safe in her hands?

Given all those developments, it is no wonder that there is now widespread speculation about a giveaway Budget. Those who call for such a Budget do so loudly and vociferously, the main reason being the imminence of a general election and the need to save Conservative skins. We are experiencing the worst recession since the end of the second world war; after 13 years of the present Government, business confidence is at an all-time low.

My feeling is that the Government's crocodile tears will be shed too late, and they will be swept from power. When Labour is returned to office, however, it will face a mighty challenge. My advice to my Front-Bench colleagues is to be bold. I have no wish to criticise my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith)—I think that he will make a fine Chancellor—but the lessons of history bear out my analysis. Back in 1931, restraint and cuts were the wrong medicine, and led to the downfall of a Labour Government. Likewise, between 1964 and 1967, Lord Callaghan waged a futile battle, struggling to maintain the exchange rate; that did immense damage.

[Mr. Roy Hughes]

Marx may be old hat, but, in my opinion, Keynes is back in vogue. What the economy now needs is a bit of old-fashioned pump priming. That is needed for the transport infrastructure, road and rail; and housing problems are crying out for action. Homelessness has reached record levels. Surely it is better and cheaper to build houses than to keep people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Council house sale receipts should be released: council tenants' right to buy should be retained, but the sold housing stock should be replaced. A housing drive would also provide the means of returning people to work—not only the professional architect, but the unskilled labourer.

The cuts in training provision are most unwise. Already, our skill training provision is well below that of our competitors. Money spent on training is the seedcorn for future development; our industrial competitiveness is at stake, and training should be encouraged in every way possible.

Industry badly needs new investment. Long before now a sensible Government would have sat around the table with the captains of industry and the trade unions, and outlined a package of industrial incentives to bring about the investment that is so vital.

I believe that, when the general election comes—on 9 April—the British people will finally come to realise what a disaster the past 13 years have been, and will elect a Labour Government.

7.13 pm

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): I certainly agree with the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) that there are significant regional variations in the state of the economy, and in the way in which the recession has hit our country. I found the hon. Gentleman's speech most enlightening. It gave all who heard it—I hope that many more will read it—a flavour of the pressures that could fall on any future Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer when he came to frame his Budgets. He would, for instance, be under extreme pressure to spend a great deal on pump priming, and on other policies from which some parts of the Labour party are now moving away to a significant extent.

It was interesting that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) seemed to disavow any knowledge of a world recession, especially as on Monday the managing director if ICI on Teesside, Britain's largest chemical plant, said:

"1991 was an awful lot tougher than any of us expected. This recession has been longer and deeper than anyone thought. Effectively, it has been worldwide with even Japan and Germany slowing down.

Most of our businesses are global, so we felt the effect on Teesside."

I do not know where the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East gets his information, but I should be interested to know whether he disagrees with that view. Indeed, I tried to intervene to find out.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that the Government scorned what he would describe as a sensible, planned regional policy. Over the past 12 years, however, the Government have brought about a significant turnround in the regional economy of the north of England. That may explain why Labour, having tabled a motion on the recession, has so far been unable to produce one northern Member who wishes to discuss the matter. Perhaps that is because Labour Members feel that the recession is not quite so bad in the north as it is in the south-east.

Last month, Mr. Simon Briscoe of Midland Montagu argued that the north and Scotland should reap the benefits of the often painful restructuring in the 1980s. While the south-east is experiencing post-boom retrenchment in the financial services sector, with adverse effects for the housing market and the construction industry, more distant parts of Britain, Mr. Briscoe says, frequently have a varied manufacturing base and growing service industries.

The Government's role in the north-east, as elsewhere, has been to create a climate in which businesses can prosper and, in turn, generate strong and sustainable employment growth. However, in view of the region's deep-rooted difficulties—such as its long-standing over-dependence on declining industries—the Government have sought to underpin those policies with substantial central support. Indeed, the north-east region has benefited to the tune of more than £3·5 billion since 1979.

I might just point out that that money is composed of the old regional development grant, the new regional development grant, regional selective assistance, urban programmes, urban development corporation funds, derelict land grant, housing investment programmes and estate action programmes. The most significant element —the urban development corporations on Teesside and Tyneside—have a budget allocation of £51 million each for the current year.

As we heard earlier from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, this country has been the most significant player in the international market in attracting inward investment into the country and, in particular, our region. Dr. John Bridge, the Northern Development Company's chief executive, says:

"Since 1985, some 25,000 jobs have either been created or safeguarded in the north of England as a result of inward investment."

He estimates that since 1985 a total of £2 billion has come into the region as a result of inward investment.

Mr. Briscoe of Midland Montagu sees "a multi-track Britain" in 1992, with recovery beginning in Scotland and the north of England, only to reach the south-east some time later. I know that that will be sad news for some of my hon. Friends. I should mention in passing that the uniform business rate, which the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) described as a significant cost to industry, has been of substantial benefit to manufacturing industries in the north.

No one says that there is no recession in the north of England, and I shall not say that either. There is indeed a recession—it is a worldwide recession, but it has had significant effects in the north of England and Scotland. Even so, the Institute of Directors' bi-monthly poll found that northern businesses are much more confident of recovery than those anywhere else in the country. The MORI poll of 500 chief executives found that 70 per cent. of northern businesses were confident of economic recovery very soon this year.

Stockbrokers BWD Rensberg, based in Hull, said that the northern region from the Lake district to Teesside, incorporating north Yorkshire and Humberside—the area represented so ably by my hon. Friend the Member for

Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague)—was an area where disposable income was as high as that in the south-east because the cost of living was lower while pay was comparable.

It is interesting to note that in Darlington the jobless total has just dipped below the national average of 10 per cent. That is nothing short of a miracle, according to John Vaughan, Darlington council's assistant economic development officer, who is reported as saying:

"whether the town can continue to buck the national jobless trend into 1992 is heavily dependent on how far away the recovery really is".

However, Mr. Vaughan believes that until now, the signs, including those in the retail sector, have been very good. I am talking about a Labour-controlled council, and those are the comments of an independent official of that council. I have no doubt that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science, who represents that town and who has fought so valiantly for its jobs, has contributed significantly to that trend.

We would have a much worse recession on Teesside but for the brilliant performance of our exporting industry. There are currently £400 million-worth of contracts under way at the river's three module construction yards for the offshore oil industry. Industrialists such as Joe Campbell of British Steel find that although the going is tough in their industries, they are securing significant contracts in distant parts of the world—most recently in Japan and Korea. Barry Phillipo, chief executive of Davy McKee, recently said:

"The world is in recession and people keep delaying decisions. But we have a number of prospects in the offing."

What are the Government doing to help the northern region? Let us consider briefly the total of £4 billion currently being invested in Teesside. The biggest project is the £2 billion gas pipe from Amoco's fields in the North sea, which will bring 500,000 barrels of oil ashore from Ekofisk to the Seal Sands petroleum refinery. Similarly, Teesside's development corporation project is investing £1 billion in my constituency.

ICI is constructing a new acrylics plant at Billingham, and the ICI Quorn food plant at Stokesley is receiving £37 million of investment. British Steel's new pipe mill in Hartlepool has £100 million of investment. The MTM chemical plant at Teesport is receiving £100 million. The port authority is putting £27 million into the development of the port in the next three years.

Even Middlesbrough council city challenge is renovating the city centre with a £35 million grant from central Government. Meanwhile, Sir John Hall of Wynyard is building a new business park worth £500 million. Recently we heard that the Livera Foods cake factory will bring 700 jobs to Preston Farm industrial estate and will be worth £7 million. As Sir John Hall so ably says:

"There is no other region in the UK where people have the confidence to invest."

The Middlesbrough *Evening Gazette* recently commented:

"This region once known as England's workshop is now turning out top class products and services which are helping the entire country to fight back. One of the biggest boosts to the area has been the continuing development of the Teesdale site at Thornaby"

and the new university. It continues:

"But ICI, one of the foundation stones of Cleveland's past prosperity, continues to invest"

in large-scale plant——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman's time is up. It is up once the signal on the digital clock becomes static. I hope that hon. Members will keep an eye on the clock. I dislike interrupting them in full flow and I try to indicate when they are nearing the end of their time.

7.24 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): One of the functions of a Member of Parliament is to explain as best he or she can to their constituents what is happening, why and what may be done about it. Having listened to some of the speeches today, I wonder whether they would make much sense to people who are suffering serious economic difficulties.

I make no apology for speaking about the constituency that I have the honour to represent and for describing a Chesterfield development plan which is being considered with the good will of the council of the chamber of commerce, the trade council, the law centre and the citizens advice bureau, among others.

The reason why I want to approach the problem of unemployment from the bottom up, rather than from the top down, is that I—and, I believe, many other hon. Members—believe that there is a world slump. I went further and recently used the word "slump" rather than "recession". The decline in the past 10 years has been very serious, and it is most unlikely that prosperity will trickle down from the top even if interest rates are reduced, even if the Common Market and 1992 works as promised, and even if there is a devaluation.

Every community has its own history and tradition. Chesterfield was built on coal, steel, chemicals and engineering, and it had canals and railways. During the past decade, a decision was made—not an economic but a political decision—to close the coalfields in Britain. Nuclear power costs three times as much as coal, but pits are being closed to make way for it. We heard today of the imminent announcement that the port of Immingham is to be used—as we knew it would be—to provide imported coal. I think it is likely that the north Derbyshire coalfield, which when I was elected only eight years ago provided a quarter of the employment in Chesterfield, may well go —to be replaced by imports from countries where conditions for miners are disgraceful.

Our manufacturing industry is in decline. I shall not give all the figures that other hon. Members have given, because statistics often do not reveal the true position. However, on the old 1979 figures, we have 13 per cent. unemployment—6,000 people out of work. We hear about days lost in industrial disputes, but what about days lost in unemployment? In Chesterfield, 6,000 days are lost every day because of unemployment. If one adds the number of people whose work is lost through unemployment to that of people whose work is lost through industrial disputes, one finds that the figure has soared under this Government, and it has done so at an enormous cost. I understand that every unemployed person costs nearly £9,000. Chesterfield alone is therefore paying £50 million for the privilege of having those people out of work.

Other problems include the housing crisis—the fact that no houses can be built—and the rundown of schools. I think that I speak for many hon. Members, whatever their political opinions, who take long surgeries as I do every week for four or five hours. We receive 15,000 or so letters a year. The problems brought to us divide equally into two types: those of people who are out of work and those of

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people who have needs which would be met if those out of work were in work. That is the issue which I put to the Secretary of State.

There is no question but that the Government accept a demand only if it comes from someone who can afford to pay for it. A need unbacked by money does not constitute a demand. The Secretary of State said that they did not believe in employing people to meet unmet needs because it would involve the direction of labour. I must point out that people on the dole have been directed on to the dole. If one wants to see a brutal direction of labour, one need only look to that. If money were provided for unemployed people to be used, there would be a move back towards full employment.

Two factors are necessary to achieve full employment. That is what the Chesterfield development plan is all about. First, local authorities must be provided with general powers. I will not go into the details now, but I have introduced two or three Bills to give local authorities such powers. There should be only two restraints on what they can do: the police station if there is corruption, and the polling station if they are unpopular. Apart from that, local authorities should be able to do whatever is necessary to meet local need.

The second question which always arises is: where is the money to come from? I asked the Library kindly to break down the national budget into personal figures, and I will tell the House some of those figures. I do not know where to start—except by saying that Trident has cost the people of Chesterfield £18 million, and that North sea oil and gas revenues, worked out pro rata among my constituents, would have brought £192 million to Chesterfield. Pro rata among all the people in Chesterfield, the capital exported has been more than £600 million. The EC contributions from Chesterfield alone represent £45 million.

I cited another figure earlier today—that the cost of defence is £30 per week for every family of four. When one looks at it like that, one realises that if the money were redirected—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Of course it would be redirected. Do hon. Members think that Trident should take priority over manufacturing industry? Why are the Japanese and the Germans so powerful? It is because they do not spend money on weapons on that scale. Of course, that means that the money must be provided by borrowing. The party which opposes borrowing has encouraged more irresponsible personal borrowing than any other Government. So many people who need to have reserves have been encouraged to spend them.

The way back to full employment is to fund local communities so that they can put their unemployed people back to work.

What interests me about what I have just said is that I have won the support of the local chamber of commerce, which said in a letter to me that what was needed was a new freight terminal for the east midlands, electrification, and so on. It was concerned about matching skills to jobs. There is a common interest in every community between the firms that have laid people off because money is not being spent and the community which has a need for requirements to be met.

The next election will be the 16th that I have fought as a parliamentary candidate, and I am looking forward to the whistle being blown. I believe that when that happens, our arguments are the ones that will convince people—we need homes, better schools, and better facilities. If we were to elect a Government who committed themselves to that, there would indeed be a way out of the recession. Otherwise, we shall go deeper and deeper into a situation that will prove comparable with that of the 1930s, which cost so many hopes and destroyed so many lives and which ended with right-wing Governments in Europe and a war that cost us 50 million more lives.

That is what the House should be telling the people —the truth about how to get back to full employment. If they do not do that, if they just play games, I believe that the Conservative party will come a cropper on polling day.

7.34 pm

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): It is always an honour to follow the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), but he sang the same tune, although with different words, tonight. He spoke about redistribution, which has been his clarion call all the time that I have been in the House, and all the time that he was a Minister.

In the right hon. Gentleman's speech, and in the speech of the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) we heard the authentic voice of socialism. We heard the real call for a return to the discredited policies of the past— *[Interruption.]* I hear those policies being vocally supported by Labour Members.

The hon. Member for Newport, East said, "Be bold, go further, spend more." That is what the Labour party means. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield talked about redistribution, about cutting our defences and destroying our strategic nuclear deterrent—which, incidentally, has provided employment, industry and investment in Barrow-in-Furness and the rest of the country.

The real pressure on the Labour Front-Bench spokesmen comes from their Back-Bench colleagues, who want more spending, and a greater burden of taxation on the people of this country. The Labour party has moved away from what was previously its clarion call—central planning as a means of restoring economic activity and growth. The discredited policies of the 1970s, which brought into existence the reviled National Enterprise Board and brought our economy into penury, have been replaced by a neo-socialism, which talks about redistribution.

In that policy there is as fallacious a hoax as there ever was in the calls for central planning. The call for redistribution assumes essentially that somebody will be better able to decide how money should be spent than those in whose hands it is at present. It relies on Peter robbing Paul to pay for public expenditure, hoping thereby that that money——

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Nelson: I should love to give way, but time does not permit.

The Labour party hopes that its policies will provide more investment, jobs and economic growth than would otherwise be the case. But if we examine the excessive commitments and expenditure plans of the Labour party, we find that the money will not be spent mainly on jobs, capital investment or manufacturing industry. Most of it

will go into recurrent expenditure—into the social security budget, for example, which represents £15 billion out of the £37 billion, at least, that has already been costed.

The Labour party is trying to perpetrate a cruel hoax on the electorate. It is time that we nailed the Labour lie. Redistribution will not regenerate growth in this country; it will merely add a further burden on people who are working and saving, trying to achieve some choice and an improvement in their personal standard of living.

Neither the motion, nor the contents of the speech by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) about education and training, offer any immediate panacea. Labour Members talk about cuts in the training programme—yet we are spending 2·5 times as much in real terms as the Labour party ever considered spending on education and training.

In my part of the country we have Sussex Training, of which I am honoured to be president. It has provided important vocational training for young people, expanding their vocational opportunities, and it has been significantly funded by the employment policies of the Government—not those of a Labour Government. Under Labour the money was not there, and neither were the training opportunities. A Conservative Government have delivered the goods.

For those reasons, far from Labour's policies being a kick start for the economy, they would be a kick in the teeth for the economy. It is high time that the country and the House realised that the Labour party cannot get away with trying to pretend that its policies would have neutral implications for the taxes that people pay, yet that there would also be a magic crock of gold to be dispensed with the largesse of the sheriff of Nottingham.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson), and others, have said, no one could be more conscious of the depth and severity of the recession than those of us who represent seats in the south of England. I know that, especially in the property and construction industries, the recession has been serious in my part of the country.

That is why I, with Conservative colleagues from Kent, East Sussex, West Sussex and Hampshire, wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer this week, urging him to consider introducing some relief in the uniform business rate for businesses in our constituencies. I should like to reiterate tonight to my right hon. Friends the reason why I believe that to be necessary.

Businesses in the south face a combination of the revaluation of their properties at the historical height of the market a few years ago and moving from a lower industrial rating system, under prudent Conservative councils, to a national average rate of poundage which reflects the expenditure of local authorities elsewhere. Even though the Government are rightly introducing, under the Local Government Finance Bill, transitional arrangements to help businesses in areas that have faced such big increases, businesses in the forthcoming year yet again face significant real-terms increases in their uniform business rate at a time when they can least afford it.

For those reasons, there is a strong case for doing one of two things. The first is to freeze for the forthcoming year the transitional element of the UBR increase, which will especially help those who face increases in excess of 20 per cent. in real terms. The second is to cap the extent to which any UBR increase can rise in real terms in the forthcoming year. That will not only ensure that help is directed to businesses in the south which are being hit by the reccession at this time, but will limit the overall yield cost to the Exchequer. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will consider that.

Although I make that point and although I am aware of the implications of the recession in my own constituency, I say openly in the House to the Government and to my constituents that I will continue to support the economic policies that the Government have pursued in their determination to reduce the rate of inflation. The real tragedy for our economy has not necessarily been the bantering of party politics and may not even be the differences over planning policies. The real tragedy has been the persistent level of inflation which has so increased the borrowing costs to industry that the profitability of British industry in the north and in the south of England, year after year, has suffered. We must all agree that, whether there have been Labour or Conservative Governments, the profitability of British industry, especially manufacturing industry, has been insufficient and has not begun to compare with that of our competitors.

If we can get inflation down and interest rates to follow, and if we can pursue policies that will improve the rate of productivity in British industry, the prizes will be glittering, the opportunities for British industry will be outstanding, and the prospects of investment in new technology and the expansion of markets in Europe and elsewhere will be stupendous.

What if the country took the alternative route, which is a policy of negativism—and that policy, regrettably, seemed to be described by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East? Once again, it seemed to be a policy of talking Britain down. We saw the prophets of gloom and the negativism of the Labour party. That is no part of what I stand for and it offers no prospects for my constituency. That is why we must pursue our policies; that is why we must spell them out clearly to the electorate at the next general election and that is why we shall again receive the mandate that we rightly deserve.

7.42 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): It may be too much to expect that Conservative Members will take the massive scale of unemployment in our society seriously as an economic, social and personal problem. I listened to every word of the speech by the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson). I do not recall—I will check *Hansard*—that he uttered the word "unemployment" once in his speech. He suggested that inflation was the tragedy. I suggest to him that most of the people who have experienced economic difficulties for more than 13 years—the whole of this Government's regime—have been the unemployed. I am surprised that Conservative Members cannot bring themselves to acknowledge that unemployment is a major problem in our society.

In the 15 months since the Prime Minister moved into No. 10, 841,000 people have lost their jobs. That is 3,000 people every day. In 1991 alone, unemployment rose by 700,000. Unemployment has now risen in every consecutive month for the past 22 months to an official rate of almost 2·6 million people. That means that one person in 11 is without a job.

In my constituency, according to the figures of the Department of Employment, there has been an increase of

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31 per cent. According to the figures before the 30 fiddles and changes, the rate is almost 15 per cent., according to the assessment of the Unemployment Unit. We heard yesterday that the long-term jobless total has risen by 42 per cent. in a year to almost 750,000—the highest level for three years. The number of those unemployed for more than 12 months has risen by 93,000 to 747,000 in the three months to January.

Young people, especially those in the 18 to 24 age group, bear the brunt of unemployment. The number of claimants aged between 18 and 24 has risen by 35 per cent. in the past year. In the last quarter, the number rose by 21,700 to 147,000—the highest level since October 1988.

The figures also show a sharp rise in those out of work for more than six months. The figure is up by 136,000 to 1,338,000 in the three months to January. That represents an increase of more than 56 per cent., and it is young people who now face endemic, structural, long-term unemployment. In effect, a generation is being written off, yet the Government claim success for their policies.

The hon. Member for Chichester claimed that the Government had had great success in their training provision, yet the number of adults who are out of work three months after taking part in the Government's main training programmes continues to increase—by 58 per cent. in 1990-91. Last year, the Treasury tried unsuccessfully to axe the employment training budget and it justified that approach with a forecast that fewer than three out of 10 would find a job after completing the scheme in 1992-93. According to the employment training leavers survey for 1990-91, the proportion out of work after completing the scheme in the north of England and in the west midlands rose to more than 60 per cent. In other words, there are now up to 80,000 young people who are on waiting lists because the Government cannot even honour the guarantee of youth training.

There has been a shift in strategy by the Government. They have moved away from training the long-term unemployed to giving them short-term work experience. That has been described by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research as "perverse" because of the likely increase in the number of long-term jobless. As was reported in the *Financial Times* on 28 November, the institute pointed out that in a recession more people enter long-term unemployment and many factors make it harder for them to find jobs than it is for the short-term unemployed. Today, 25 people chase every vacancy; that is the reality. If a person is unfortunate enough to be "liberated" from his job, as the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) put it so casually, his chances of becoming one of the long-term unemployed are very high. Such people are not only marginalised, but effectively written off by the Government.

Unemployment is a serious social and personal problem. It means lives of hardship, social isolation, multiple debt, and family and personal stress. Yet the Chancellor of the Exchequer described that increasing human suffering and hopelessness on 16 May 1991 as a "price well worth paying" for the Government's continued economic experiment. The Government, as in education, health and the economy, treat our people as if they are specimens in a laboratory who are to be experimented on at every turn to the point of destruction.

We occasionally hear Conservative noises about the comforting myths, such as the informal economy which means that people out of work will be OK. We are told that the unemployed can always turn to their supporting families when the Government withdraw their social security money. Those myths are constructed to minimise public sensitivity to unemployment. The Government have even had the nerve to limit the period during which the unemployed can claim benefit as if the cure for the problem of long-term joblessness is simply to ensure that people accept any job at any price when it is first offered. If they do not do so, they are crossed off the register.

As other hon. Members will remember better than I, there was a time during the post-war period, following the publication of Beveridge's "Full Employment in a Free Society" and the earlier work by Keynes, "The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money", when the state was committed to tackling the question of providing employment for everyone, and to setting the conditions for steady growth in the economy to achieve full employment and, at the same time, to keep inflation moderate. However, it has to be said that throughout their 13 years the Government have been the Government of unemployment. They have been characterised by higher unemployment than when they took office, when unemployment was 1·3 million. In every year that the Government have been in office, taking the Government's own fiddled figures, unemployment has never been below 1·7 million.

Even in the so-called boom of the 1980s, what happened? Still one in eight of the labour force were out of work. Admittedly, unemployment dropped a little between 1988 and 1990, but that was merely the result of that old-fashioned consumer spending spree. As Professor Wynne Godley said in *New Statesman and Society* on 11 January 1991, in a statement backed up by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development economic survey of 1989-90:

> "The rapid expansion of output . . . was caused entirely by the largest boom in personal consumption by far that has ever occurred."

But that short-term boom aside, the 1980s have been characterised by the Government's policy of using high unemployment to introduce cheap labour.

I close by making two references. In March 1985, the Government published a document entitled "Employment: The Challenge for the Nation". In the same month, they published a similar document entitled "Burdens on Business". What did that document recommend but that wages councils be reduced and eliminated so that wage rates could be driven down? Wage rates have gone down, especially in my area in Yorkshire. Now, in the Government's latest document "People, Jobs and Opportunity", if one reads as far as chapter 7, before which the unemployed do not even feature, one finds yet again a commitment to abolish what is left of the wages councils.

I believe that the Government are committed to using unemployment as an economic weapon. It is an instrument for introducing lower and lower wages in the false hope that they will attract inward investment. Recently Ministers went to Japan and said, "Come to Britain with the investment, because there the wages are even lower." I

recently met the ambassador to Korea, who expressed surprise that wage rates in the north of England were lower than those in Korea.

If that is the Government's economic policy, it holds out little hope for the people of Britain. Only when we have a Labour Government who treat the unemployed seriously and are committed to positive intervention in the labour market, macroeconomic stability and investment in manufacturing industry, the regions and infrastructure, will some hope be offered to the millions of unemployed who have been written off in the years of Conservative government.

7.51 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): The Labour party's motion simply says that the House

"calls upon the Government to adopt policies which promote investment, reduce unemployment, and tackle Britain's major training and skills crisis."

There is an old adage that people who live in glasshouses should not throw stones. I begin with the question that I put to the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). I asked how he thought that increased taxation and national insurance contributions would help to drag Britain out of the recession. Significantly, I had no material response to that question.

We must recognise that increasing taxation reduces investment. It takes money out of the pockets of the public and reduces their spending capacity. It pushes up interest rates and inflation and, of course, reduces the price of houses, which are the basis of many people's savings and the most important thing that they buy in their life. All in all, increasing taxation amounts to bad news. I suggest to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench, and to the Opposition, that the way forward is not to increase taxation. That will only deepen the recession.

The way forward is to cut taxation and give industry incentives for capital purchases of machinery. It is to put more money into the pockets of the public, whether by cutting the basic rate of tax, by increasing tax thresholds by more than the rate of inflation, or by other methods, but the certain recipe for disaster is to increase taxation. The public must realise that.

The problems of unemployment and the recession have been mentioned in the debate. In the north-west, for the first time in my nine years in the House, I see a north-south divide, but it is the reverse of the one in the early 1980s. In my constituency in west Lancashire, where the new town of Skelmersdale has been marked out in the past as a place of high unemployment, unemployment is now 22·5 per cent. lower than when I was last elected, in June 1987.

The Halifax survey covering 1990 and 1991 shows that, in the housing market in the north-west region, there has been an increase of more than 30 per cent. on average in house values. In the last quarter of 1991, apparently at the height of the recession, there was a 4·1 per cent. increase in the value of our homes. Yes, we are losing jobs, but we are still hanging on to vast amounts of manufacturing jobs. In the north-west, 27 per cent. of our work force is in manufacturing jobs, compared with 23 per cent. in the other regions of Britain.

I see nothing but disaster if the Labour party, as it has pledged to do, cuts a further £6 billion from the defence budget over and above what is proposed in "Options for Change". There is no comfort in Labour's policies for the blue-collar workers of Preston and Warton at British Aerospace, Ferranti, Leyland DAF and throughout the north-west.

To those who live in glasshouses and throw stones, I say, "Why do you not examine your policies? Let us see whether they will be better than those advocated by the Government." First, interest rates would rise. Most commentators assume that, if Labour were elected, there would be a substantial rise. DKB Bank and the Nomura Research Institute predict a 2 per cent. rise. We also hear from Crédit Lyonnais that

"the higher inflation, borrowing and balance of payments deficit under Labour would push short-term interest rates sharply higher to defend the pound—by up to four points by the end of four years."

That is from its document, "Life under Labour", dated 1 October 1991.

Higher interest rates would increase the cost of mortgages, reduce consumer confidence and push down the value of houses. What it would do for the building industry is beyond credibility. The construction industry desperately needs help, but it certainly does not need higher interest rates, which would virtually make it disappear completely. Industry's costs would rise as a result of higher interest rates. In a manufacturing region such as mine, what would happen with the minimum wage and the social chapter? They would make Britain less competitive in the world. As a consequence, we would see less investment, fewer jobs, and lower standards of living in the north-west region and difficulties all round.

A Japanese industrialist recently called the social chapter "commercial suicide". Yet the Leader of the Opposition will urge us to sign on, despite the problems. We cannot underestimate the effect of the minimum wage. We would probably lose 2 million jobs, large numbers of which would be in the north-west of England. UBS Phillips and Drew states in its "Economic Briefing" of 8 July 1991:

"in straight economic terms, Labour's minimum pay proposals would be a big blunder".

That is a great understatement.

Higher taxes are proposed. The Labour party proposes £37 billion of extra spending. That will inevitably lead to higher rates of taxation for basic rate taxpayers right across the board. That will damage enterprise and inevitably result in a brain drain such as we saw in the 1970s. With free movement in the employment market, people will go to other countries with lower taxes and better standards of living. Labour's spending plans suggest that vastly increased taxes all round will have a strong impact on spending within the community. That will be bad for the economy.

It is foolish to think that increases in higher-rate taxes will increase the amount of tax taken. The tax avoidance industry would come back into operation and the tax take would be lower, as has been proved by experience in the rest of the European Community and in the United States. That can only damage the position in Britain. Inevitably a Labour Chancellor will have to turn to the basic rate taxpayer and ask for increases in the basic rate of taxation.

Inward investment is the key to our present prosperity. We receive the largest proportion of inward investment in the European Community and jobs are being created. Immediately we signed on for the social chapter of the Maastricht agreement, investment would disappear and go elsewhere, possibly to the Pacific basin. We would never get those jobs back.

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Finally, we must consider Labour's policy of being hand in glove with the trade unions. We must not forget that the trade unions came first and spawned the Labour party. They are its paymasters and, to a large extent, it will do what it is told. That will mean an inevitable return to some of the unpleasant and in many respects damaging trade practices that we consistently swept away through our employment legislation in the 1980s. That would mean fewer jobs, less inward investment, more disruption and a less prosperous Britain.

Last year, 800,000 working days were lost through strike action, compared with 29 million in 1979. That cannot be of any benefit to the community. The success of the Government's industrial relations policy is an example to the world, and I am afraid that that will be lost.

We have low inflation, but Labour's policies will result in high inflation. Our interest rates are down 4·5 per cent. in a year. Inflation is down. We have record exports and an increasing share of world manufacturing trade. We are spending £2·8 billion on training, and industry is spending £20 billion. One in four of our students go into higher education—it was one in eight in 1979—and we are heading for one in three. Those policies, and not the policies advocated by the Labour party, will bring Britain out of recession.

We should listen to the managing director of Coats Viyella who has said that, if Labour comes to power with its minimum wage, 11,000 jobs will disappear overnight. How many more will follow? The public must realise that they have no future under Labour. All they will have is Labour's hand in their pockets.

8.2 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): The most interesting aspect of today's debate was the extraordinary speech by the Secretary of State for the Environment. On a personal level, I do not begrudge him his parliamentary success but Conservative Members, especially those on the Front Bench, may take a different attitude, especially when the Conservative party has lost the next election and the leadership stakes begin to shape up. The right hon. Gentleman's speech was all about that and had nothing to do with the disastrous situation which 13 years of Tory government have caused the country and its economy.

It is hard to see how the Secretary of State could have made a different speech. He would have been indulging in a classic recantation if he had attempted a sustained or reasoned defence of Government policies and achievements in the past 13 years. It would have been a total recantation of everything that he has stood for in his political life. It would have been a specific recantation of his remarkable speech to the Tory Reform group two years ago, when he was unfettered by Government office and unshackled by the failures of the Government with whom he finds himself inextricably entwined—probably to his regret.

If I take five or six of the main points from that speech and compare them with what the Government have done, hon. Members will realise the sort of problems that the Secretary of State would have faced had he tried to defend those policies. First, he described the inadequacy—both in volume and character—of Conservative training programmes. What has happened since then? Recently they have been hacked further to pieces, and the Government have been concentrating more and more on people at the bottom of the skills table.

Another issue to which the Secretary of State graphically referred in his speech to the Tory Reform Group was education and our comparative inadequacies within the European scene—our failure to perform, compared with the achievements of Japan. What has happened? What has been the Government's most indicative action to ensure that education standards are maintained—let us not speak of an improvement? The Tory Government's reaction has been to privatise the inspectorate. Could there be a more pathetic or more irrelevant reaction to a great national problem?

Thirdly, the Secretary of State referred to the attractions of a development agency for England. Present Tory policies show a pathological hatred of any sort of regional development policy—a hatred which is bringing us to the point where, because of their antagonism to Scottish feelings, they are hell bent on the annihilation of the Tory party in Scotland. That seems to be a perverse policy. If it were pursued—thank heavens that that will not be allowed—it would threaten the very Union.

Those are three significant areas in which Government policy has been disastrous for the nation. The Secretary of State exposed them about two years ago before he took office and so we could not expect him to defend them today.

Let us consider three other interlinked areas which Labour Members agree are vital to economic success: the overriding importance of manufacturing; the balance of payments as the essential criterion to determine economic and industrial success; and, if one accepts those two overriding priorities, their inescapable implications for the exchange rate mechanism, the value of sterling and the other currencies within it. I mention the latter in the same context as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) mentioned it earlier.

I shall not bore the House at this late stage with all the essential figures, which have been rehearsed. They simply point to the fact that we have the worst record among our major competitors for manufacturing output and investment. There are no two ways about it. Even on a partisan occasion such as this I would go so far as to say that British Governments have had to wrestle with that deep-rooted problem.

However, the Government's policies have been marked, first, by their malign neglect of that problem and now by their benign neglect of it. They have never really set out to deal with our manufacturing problems. As a result, they have managed to heap £70 billion of foreign exchange debt on the shoulders of people in this country in the past four years. What sort of achievement is that?

It is no good talking about productivity increases and our increased share of world trade. The latter is an indictor, but the ultimate determinant is the balance between imports and exports. That alone tells us whether we are succeeding as a nation. It is clear from the Government's record that there is no way that it can be called anything other than a calamitous defeat for our industry. That has been brought about by the combination of perverse economic policies carried out by the Tory Administration.

Even in the past two years, while the country has been moving towards recession—and has been in recession for

the past 18 months—the Government have managed to achieve a £10 billion deficit in our balance of payments, which is amazing. One could expect that to happen during a boom, if we were trying to encourage an investment boom, or in most other circumstances except for recession, and we are in the longest recession since the second world war. Conservative Members are still using the absurd argument that the whole world is in recession.

It may be true that there has been a slowdown in world trade. However, in 1990-91 most of the major world markets enjoyed solid growth in trade, except the United Kingdom. The fact that there is now a general slowdown in world trade means that our recession, which is already the longest in our post-war history, will last even longer.

The Government may argue that they are doing everything right and that everyone is experiencing recession, but surely action should be taken now. Action should be taken to help the construction industry, but, unfortunately, the Conservative party cannot forget its hidebound, ingrained dislike of any form of public sector investment. My constituency is in the west midlands where the car industry is in great need of help. The 10 per cent. special car tax could be scrapped. Even some Conservative Members have argued that the business rate should be reduced. I also believe that 50 per cent. capital allowances should be restored. All those steps could be taken, but they will not be. We know that, because of the Government's incompetence, the recession will be allowed to drag on, which means that our people will suffer unhappiness and destitution for even longer.

It has been argued that the people do not yet blame the Conservative party for the recession, but it is the Government's incompetence that has brought us to this. I shall argue that point day in, day out up to the next election. I believe that we will win the argument. The Prime Minister may profess his concern. That is fine, but nothing can condone his professional incompetence.

I believe that the people will come to see that we need a Labour Government with policies that are designed to restore a sense of purpose and the correct order of priorities necessary to rebuild the country and its economy.

8.11 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): I owe you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the House an apology for having been absent for much of the debate, because I am a member of the Committee on the Further and Higher Education Bill. I was particularly keen to speak in this debate because I wanted to expose the extraordinary argument advanced by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), whose speech I was able to hear.

One of the great advantages of coming in and out of a debate is that one can gauge the reaction of the media and hon. Members to what has been said so far. It is clear that there is agreement on both sides of the House about the fact that this is a deep and difficult recession. The hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) recognised, if somewhat opaquely, that the recession is international. Surely he has seen the irrefutable evidence from Germany and America to demonstrate the international nature of that recession. Both those countries are important to other European economies, and their experience demonstrates that one cannot say that the recession has been made in Britain.

The comments that I have heard about the debate have made me realise the grave difficulty in which the Opposition have landed themselves. The nature of the recession requires the policies that the Government have been pursuing as they will bring about the upturn that will undoubtedly come. Hard and harsh though the recession is, our policies are the right ones, and they will be successful.

It is equally clear that the Labour party crafted the policies that it wanted to implement in the unlikely event of winning the election at a different point in the economic cycle from that which we face today. How on earth can any party hope to be treated with any economic respect when, in the teeth of a difficult recession, it intends to raise taxation? No respectable economist would ever suggest that raising taxes would do anything but make the recession worse. In fact, the great danger is that it could lead to a double-dip recession. That would be the result if the Opposition's policies were followed.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I accept that, on the normal definition, Germany is marginally in recession. There are various reasons for that. It also faces the obvious difficulty of having to deal with the problems of East Germany. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can tell me of another Community member state, besides the United Kingdom, that is in recession.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is as capable as I am of reading the statistics of economic trends in other countries. He accepts that Germany is marginally in recession; therefore, he is arguing my precise point. Germany is in recession and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Secretary will demonstrate that it is an international one.

When mistakes were made in 1987, the Labour party offered advice on how to deal with the difficulties that the economy faced. If we had followed it, the recession would have been much worse and more difficult to contend with. Judgment had to be exercised by the Government about what to do with interest rates, and at that very point the policy of the Labour party, as described in the Chamber and in speech after speech by the Leader of the Opposition, was that interest rates should be cut further. With hindsight, it is clear that that was entirely the wrong answer. What a good thing for the country and for our business men that the Leader of the Opposition's policies were not followed by the Treasury.

Our policies are the right ones to get us out of the recession. It will be a long and difficult process, and I accept that, in many constituencies, the consequences have been tough for those with small businesses. The only long-term solution is one that leads to low inflation, stable growth and competitiveness. We have pursued the policies designed to achieve that. We have the guts to stick to our guns to ensure that, when the upturn comes, it is real rather than the illusory type which is the speciality of the Labour party.

The extent to which the Labour party is boxed in because it composed its policies at a different point in the economic cycle is truly enormous. Apart from the Opposition's stated intention of raising taxes in a recession, one must also consider what would happen to the 180,000 teachers who earn more than £20,280 per annum. They would be faced with an immediate tax increase. Do the Opposition really believe that teachers are

[Mr. Mitchell]

overpaid? Do they want to cut their take-home pay just when the Government have demonstrated their support for teachers and when the pay review body has now ensured that they are better rewarded?

Hamish McRae argued persuasively in *The Independent* that, if the Opposition's policies were implemented at this point in the economic cycle, they would threaten the housing market, which is in an extremely delicate state. He also argued that their policies would cause grave damage to the economy and threaten the income of those who, because of the recent reductions in interest rates, have a little more spending money and greater ability to meet the cost of their home loan. Those advantages would be prejudiced by the taxation policies of the Opposition.

We cannot even get a straight answer from the Opposition on their taxation policies. Would they or would they not immediately abolish the higher threshold on national insurance? We get one answer from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), another from the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and yet another from the shadow Chancellor. Millions of people need to know the answer, but they have not had it from the Opposition. Why should redundant miners in Nottinghamshire see the redundancy money that they have earned threatened by a savings tax, as proposed by the Opposition? Many former miners in my constituency want to know the answer.

When will we get an answer to the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) about the minimum wage? The Labour party claims to be concerned about unemployment, and it is truly extraordinary that it should put forward the fatuous and bizarre policy of a minimum wage.

Dr. Marek: I will not comment upon the minimum wage, but as for lifting the cut-off point for national insurance contributions, we will consult with the civil service to see how that could be done easily. We have made that commitment. The hon. Gentleman should also note that no one who is earning less than £21,000 a year will pay a single penny extra tax as a result of our policies.

Mr. Mitchell: Why will the hon. Gentleman not answer our questions about the minimum wage? He simply said that he would rather ignore the whole issue. I gather from his other remarks—I shall have to read what he said in the *Official Report*—that we have a fourth version of Labour's plans for national insurance. That must be added to the three versions which I outlined. In other words, we are no less confused than before the hon. Gentleman's intervention. He might also have commented on the whole issue of the taxation of pensioners' nest eggs. When will we get a straight answer from the Labour party on that and many other taxation matters?

A hard and severe struggle is being faced by many unemployed people in my constituency and elsewhere. My party is committed to offering long-term hope to the unemployed by pursuing policies of low inflation and stable growth. Under Labour, we would have just pious words and platitudes, with a short-term fix and a long-term return to the trend of higher unemployment. That is why every Labour Government have seen an increase in the level of unemployment on leaving office compared with when taking office.

Although Opposition Members are full of good intentions, their actions do not measure up to the harsh and tough policies that must be taken if unemployment is to be conquered and fuller employment is to return. Britain has more people in employment as a percentage of its population than any other European country, apart from Denmark.

In a number of areas Labour Members tentatively recognise the new realities of competition, free enterprise rather than nationalisation, and central planning, but they do not embrace them. They have abandoned principles held since 1945 and earlier by their party and have adopted a new set of principles which they believe will inveigle the electorate into giving them the keys to Downing street. They cannot get away with that.

We are the party of free enterprise. We brought about huge changes throughout the 1980s in the supply side of the economy. That is why the Prime Minister will still be occupying his position on the Government Front Bench after the general election, whenever it occurs.

8.22 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) for warming up the House for me. It is clear that the name A. Mitchell appearing on the television screens all over the Palace has brought Members flooding into the Chamber. Even so, I will not follow the line taken by the hon. Gentleman, because it was typical of the performance of his hon. Friends in the debate. They have adduced two arguments only—that it is a world recession, and that the Labour party in power would make it worse. That was put over as a knockabout turn by the Secretary of State and as a more serious exercise, at a higher intellectual level, by the hon. Member for Gedling.

But both arguments are fallacious, particularly the claim that we are in a world recession. It does not explain why this country went into recession earlier and is in deeper now, making it harder here. The answer is that the recession is a direct consequence of Government policy. The Conservatives came to power and installed massive deflation in the first three years, the results of which closed down about a quarter of Britain's manufacturing capacity, with a huge loss of jobs.

They followed that with a kind of North sea bubble in which rising asset prices and looser credit pursued each other, so that one inflated the other. That inflated demand. British manufacturing, which had been decimated in the recession, could not cope with it. Imports were sucked in and inflation developed. In that situation the Government panic and start damping down. The cause of the recession has been the Government's attempt to damp down the consequences of their own folly. In doing that, they deliberately meant their measures to be painful.

"If it isn't hurting, it isn't working,"

the present Prime Minister told us. The Government's chosen instrument, they told us, would hurt, and it has. The pain is being felt all over the country. It is acute in Grimsby. It is terrible to se our constituencies bleeding with the loss of jobs, with industries closing, with people being thrown out of work and their houses being repossessed. That is all happening because of the Government's policies.

They have added to those consequences by nailing the lid down on the recession, because, as they began their punitive measures, they entered the exchange rate

mechanism with the pound high and with interest rates at an unnaturally high level. The pound was high because the economy was being deflated, so they nailed the lid down on the deflation. The present Prime Minister took office and with his decisive, firm, tough, aggressive manner bullied the weak and wilting previous Prime Minister into joining the ERM against her better judgment. We are now seeing the consequences of that.

It is a mistake to have a fixed exchange rate because the exchange rate is a market clearing mechanism which must change with circumstances. It is a heightened mistake to tie our exchange rate to that of a major competitor, and thus tie our economic cycle, which is different from its, because we are forced to act on its behalf. It is a folly to make changes in the exchange rate subject to the consent and agreement of competitors who have a vested interest in seeing our exchange rate over-valued because it safeguards their access to our market.

That is a folly, but it is a disaster to do all that at an over-valued rate, which is what we did. The rate was high and it has got higher since, because our inflation has been higher. Other economies have increased their productivity and productive power and are therefore in a more powerful position. So the gap has widened and the pound is now grossly over-valued in that situation.

The currency of a nation must be over-valued if that nation is in continuous and sustained deficit, especially in a recession. It is a horrendous symptom of industrial weakness, but it is also a symptom of the exchange rate being over-valued. It is clear that this deficit requires a devaluation. It is not a matter of morality. It just must happen. The United States faced a similar deficit in 1985. The dollar has come down by about 40 per cent. and the pound must come down, too. It is the only way open to us; otherwise, we are faced with long-term deflation which will be devastating for industry and jobs, which will take years rather than months to carry out and which will undermine permanently the competitive power of our economy.

Deflation is the only alternative to devaluation, so devaluation is the only way out. We cannot lower interest rates because of the ERM, but if we did, it would not achieve anything unless our industries were competitive, making our exports competitive. If, as some hon. Members have suggested, the Government borrowed to cut taxes in the budget, the money thereby pumped out would simply wash overseas at this level of over-valuation. It would suck in imports rather than having a beneficial effect. The multiplier has gone to live in Germany, and it is as simple as that.

We in Britain must increase demand and channel it to British industry by a competitive exchange rate. That is the only way to increase profitability. It is a question of allowing British industry to make a profit, enabling it to produce and invest in this country. The profitability of our manufacturing has been consistently lower than that of its competitors and of sheltered industry. The position must be redressed in favour of British manufacturing.

The exports of British industry are not profitable at the moment. We are exporting, but we are doing so by throwing overboard research, design, development, investment, jobs—anything—just to keep going. But many of those exports are not profitable. So there must be a devaluation, and it must be substantial.

That brings us to the heart of the problem. We cannot devalue, we are told, because of our membership of the ERM. In other words we cannot recover because we are not allowed to do so. We would be accused of being uncommunautaire if we were to devalue in the ERM, or came out of the mechanism and devalued. So jobs are being lost, factories are being closed and houses are being repossessed to show what good Europeans we are and to demonstrate our commitment to an ERM which is not in the interests of this country.

That is the essence of the argument, and it means that deflation will go on, because there is no way out of it. We shall have the same sustained deflation as France and Italy had in the 1980s, with the same consequences on employment, with rising Government expenditure, with diminishing Government receipts as profits and jobs go down, and with an increasing Government deficit. That is the inevitable consequence. Everything will have to be cut simply to allow us to stay in the ERM. It will be a disaster for this country. The British people are not being told that all this is being done for the exchange rate mechanism. If they were told the truth, their answer could be summed up in three words, two of which would be "the ERM".

Deflation is becoming a way of life, and it is horrifying to see it as an orthodoxy from all three main parties, all the pundits, the CBI and the Bank of England. They all say the same thing and they are all wrong. The only way to revive the economy is to devalue, as happened in the 1920s when Churchill took us back to gold standards—an over-valued rate—and Keynes wrote about "The Economic Consequences of Mr. Churchill". The same could be written now, entitled "The Economic Consequences of Mr. Major".

The depression will go on unless we devalue. We must have a competitive exporting industry. I am happy to see the Conservatives go down chanting the mantra that pain is good, decline is growth and ruin is improvement. It could not have happened to a nicer party. However, I do not want Labour to break itself in government on the altar of a financial orthodoxy that is not mine. I am not in politics to make Europe fit for central bankers to rule in. I am in politics to improve the lot of the people, to generate jobs, growth and expansion—all the measures which make people's lives better and which, in turn, generate public spending to improve the quality of that life. We cannot do that unless we devalue.

We must swing back the balance that over-valuation, for a prolonged period, has pushed in directions that are damaging to the people. We must move those balances back from investment overseas to investment in this country, from imports to production, and from wealth to work. We must make money cheap and people dear, not the other way round as it is at present.

8.32 pm

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): I respect the principles and the well-argued standpoint of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), although I do not agree with him. At least he has a principled viewpoint, which cannot be said for the views on Europe of the Opposition Front Bench.

No one denies that the economy faces serious difficulties,. The problem is to convince the Opposition that our troubles are being experienced, to some degree, elsewhere. I set great store by what my constituents tell me, and some interesting observations arise from that exercise. The mood of the average business man in my constituency —*[Interruption.]* If hon. Members will wait, I shall tell

[Mr. Stephen Day]

them precisely what it is. My constituents realise that they are experiencing great difficulties, and I could not describe them as particularly happy. I understand that, but the greatest factor that comes through when I speak to them is that of fear—not fear of the recession, but fear of the election of a Labour Government.

I do not believe that it will be possible—I hope that it is—for us to witness real signs of recovery this side of a general election, for the simple reason that that fear manifests itself in the business community's belief that it is not safe to invest in their businesses with that ever-present threat. The only way that we shall see the economy move forward is for the general election to be held and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to be returned to No. 10, as I am confident that he will be.

I invite Opposition Members to come to my constituency and witness the fear of the business community. It would be refreshing for Opposition Members to see a part of the country that has the good sense to have only 9 per cent. of the electorate voting for the Labour party. If they came to my constituency, they would find a very different mood from the one that they think prevails throughout the country. My constituents remember only too well what life was like under a Labour Government, before the Conservatives came to power in 1979, and they do not want to return to that scenario. Again, that is a strong feeling that I get from my constituents.

The Labour party has a recipe for everything, and it is the same now as it has always been: if there is a problem, throw money at it. It does not ask where the money comes from or whether it will be used effectively, but simply throws it at the problem. On every issue that the Labour party deals with, its answer is that wonderful word "resources". Anybody who understands that word knows that resources are finite. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) would do himself and his party a favour if he began to understand the basic meaning of an important word that the Labour party uses regularly but does not seem to understand.

A classic example can be found in one of the most important areas of the economy—the national health service. It is important to the economy because it employs so many people. Indeed, it is the largest employer in the country.

Mr. David Evans: It employs a million people.

Mr. Day: As my hon. Friend says, it employs a million people, so it is larger than the red army, when that was intact.

Labour constantly says that it would spend more money on the national health service, but where is the evidence? When the last Labour Government were in power, it was the only time when the NHS suffered actual cuts in spending—yet the Labour party claims to be the defender of the health service. The same would happen again because we hear the same rhetoric.

The Labour party says that it would spend more on roads, education, training and everything else, but it never asks where the money will come from, never daring to admit where it will come from. It cons the public into believing that the money will be found through systems of taxation that will affect no one, yet Labour Members think that people will vote for them. What nonsense—the British people will not fall for that, and the nearer we get to an election the more that will become self-evident.

Cheadle is a prosperous constituency, but it suffers some difficulties at present. One of its difficulties concerns the British Aerospace plant at Woodford. We all know that the difficulties of British Aerospace have much to do with the so-called "peace dividend". At Woodford, however, that is not precisely the case, because Woodford is successfully engaged in the production of the 146—the so-called "silent jet". Although I am sincerely upset for all those who have lost their jobs in other parts of the country, I am pleased that we have managed to limit job losses in Woodford to just 70. I readily accept that that is no comfort to the 70 people who have lost their jobs. I shall visit the plant on Friday to discuss how the management will implement job cuts, and I hope that there will be no enforced redundancies.

Interestingly, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East cannot accept that there is a world recession. He should come with me on Friday to meet the management at Woodford. He would then find out that the reason for those 70 job cuts is that there has been a collapse in aircraft sales in the United States. The airline industry is in recession and the market is in decline. Yet the right hon. and learned Gentleman says that there is no world recession and that our problems are all caused by the Government. He is living in cloud-cuckoo-land.

One aspect of his accusation is particularly offensive. When there is a total reluctance to accept what is manifestly the case and people are suffering from it, how on earth can the Opposition hope to deal with the issue and provide policies that will help people to avoid the situation that those 70 people at Woodford now face? The Opposition find it easier and more politically acceptable to use that misery and suffering as a stick to beat the Government. It is a question of cheap votes, and, coming from a party that says it wishes to rule this country, that is extremely depressing. I am sure that for that reason, among others, that will not happen.

We have heard today another argument put forward by those who say that there is no world recession and no recession in the United States. I should like to hear in the Opposition's winding-up speech an explanation of the difficulty in which President Bush finds himself on the domestic front because of the recession in the United States. Everywhere he goes, he gets into trouble about the recession—the recession which does not exist. Perhaps Opposition Members should go and explain to President Bush that his worries are ill-founded, that there is no recession in the United States. On the other hand, any hon. Member doing so would learn something and would come back with a recognition of the realities of the world—in particular, the realities of the economy of the United States and of the British economy.

No one can deny that we are deep in recession, but we have laid the groundwork for progress when the upturn comes. Companies are more competitive, and we have seen loss-making nationalised industries turned into profit-making industries. In the British economy, we have the basis for progress within Europe and the rest of the world. I am proud to say that for many years I was a member of the Institute of Export. Before coming to this House, I was involved in selling products abroad. We owe a great debt to our exporters. Those firms recognise that, if they are to continue to compete, if they are to continue to be a great

credit to their industries and to this country, the last thing that is needed is the election of the Labour party, which has no grasp whatever of what is required for Britain's future.

8.42 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): At the beginning of this debate we witnessed a spectacle on the Government Benches and heard from the Secretary of State for the Environment a speech that summed up quite brilliantly why the current Government have no friends in my country—Scotland—and fewer and fewer friends south of the border. In all the nauseating point-scoring of the Secretary of skate—"skate" is a good word, but I mean the Secretary of State—we heard nothing at all offering one scintilla of hope to the millions of our fellow-citizens who are without work and without homes and who will be without any kind of economic prospects while the Conservative Government waste their time in office.

The Secretary of State's knowledge of Scotland is so limited that he believes that in Scotland there is a place called Edinburgh, Monklands. The fact that Edinburgh is the Scottish capital on the east coast, while Monklands is in Lanarkshire on the west coast, was totally lost on the Secretary of State, yet this man purports to be a senior Minister in a Government charged with responsibility for running Scotland. He could not even find Scotland unless someone took him by the hand and showed him where it was.

His ignorance of Scotland is so pervasive that he is undoubtedly equally ignorant of a crisis facing a company in my constituency this very evening. I refer to Alma Holdings, which manufactures confectionery. The firm employs about 300 people in Dundee, and hundreds more across the Tay in Fife, in Kirkcaldy and Glenrothes. Tonight Alma Holdings has been forced to call in the receiver as a result of the mother and father of economic recessions, which has been caused by the present Government's policies.

It is in recessionary times such as these that belts have to be tightened and spending has to be cut. It is in recessionary times such as these that the public stops buying the kind of confectionery that Alma Holdings produces. If that company is not selling, it is not earning; if it is not earning, it is not able to sustain employment as it has in the past. That is why the receiver has had to be called in. Such is the reality facing people trying to run businesses while the Conservative Government are in office. It is entirely remote from empty rhetoric such as we have heard from Government Members during this debate.

We are now in an infinitely worse economic situation that the country faced in 1979, when the Tory Opposition claimed that Labour Britain "wasn't working". The current Prime Minister took part in that campaign nearly 13 years ago. Like every other Tory taking part in that campaign, he had no misgivings whatsoever about blaming the then economic troubles on the then Labour Government. He did not then mouth weak excuses such as are now trotted out by Ministers. At that time we heard from the Conservatives nothing about the battle against inflation. We did not then hear Tory Members say that "if it isn't hurting, it isn't working", or that it is a price worth paying. There were no such words back in 1979. Then the situation was simple and straightforward to them: there was mass unemployment and there was a Labour Government, and the first was caused by the second.

Now, 13 years later, we have twice and three times the 1979 level of mass unemployment. Why are the Tories not now doing what they did then? Why are they not blaming the situation on the elected Government? Why the inconsistency? Perhaps consistency is not something that the public have come to expect from political parties, but, given the circumstances that now face this country—recession and mass unemployment—a little humility would not be out of place. We might hear a note of regret about the suffering of the millions in the dole queues and of their families.

There might even be a little remorse about the million more who are trapped into poverty wages as a result of the Government's deliberate policy, perhaps even a little shame that, after 13 years of Tory government, almost one quarter of Europe's 50 million poor live in Britain. Given these appalling circumstances, we should not be asking too much if we were to expect the Government to begin to recognise that perhaps—just perhaps—they got it wrong in the past and that it might be time to change their economic policies.

In the Government's amendment to the Opposition's motion, there is no sign whatsoever of recognition that the Tories may have made mistakes. In fact, the Government, in the amendment, congratulate themselves on what they call success. Success? Millions of families throughout this country must be saying to themselves tonight, "If this is success, God preserve us from failure." The amendment goes on to boast about what the Government call the foundations for economic recovery, which we are told have now been firmly laid. "Foundations for economic recovery" is yet another euphemism for throwing millions of people out of work for the purpose of deflating the economy and bringing inflation under control.

The foundations for economic recovery were supposed to have been laid at the end of the last Tory recession in the early 1980s. We were told then that the price had been paid for the breakthrough that would sustain economic recovery. In fact, we were told that such a breakthrough had been achieved. At that time, the Tories liked to call it the British economic miracle. It was the high point of the then rising tide of Thatcherism, the pinnacle of the achievements of the then Tory Chancellor, whom the Prime Minister called "my brilliant, brilliant Chancellor".

Of course, both of them have now gone, and neither is lamented in any way by Labour Members. But their skeletons are still rattling very loudly in the cupboards of the right hon. Gentleman who is now Prime Minister, who at that time was their protegé and owed his personal advancement to their sponsorship. Now the Prime Minister does not give them a second glance. He tries to place the maximum distance between himself and their political heritage before facing the British people in a general election. So far as the Prime Minister is concerned, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) and the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) might never have existed. Indeed, I am sure that he sometimes wishes that they had never existed.

But exist they did, and so does the economic damage that they inflicted upon the British people. If the Tories think that, by ditching those two individuals, they have absolved themselves of responsibility for 13 wasted Tory years, they are very sadly mistaken. It was not this or that

[Mr. John McAllion]

individual who foisted upon the British people the ghastly experiment of monetarism; it was not this or that individual who forced through the poll tax in defiance of public opinion. It was each and every Tory Member of Parliament who, throughout those 13 years, knowingly gave their support.

Chief among those, of course, was the present Prime Minister, who was the most loyal supporter of the Government at that time—until it was in his personal interests to cease his support. In every sense of the word, the right hon. Gentleman was a right honourable rat deserting a sinking ship.

The flagship has sunk and pulled down its captain. It is now the turn of the rest of the crew who are beginning to sing a slightly different economic tune. They say that it is all the fault of a global economic crisis and nothing to do with the British Government. They say that Germany, Japan and the United States are all at the mercy of huge, international and impersonal economic forces that are sweeping the world and leaving in their wake international recession and mass unemployment.

In their desperation, the Tories are beginning to sound like so many Trotskyists as they say that it is all the fault of capitalism, and nothing can be done by any elected Government. Capitalism is cyclical—bust follows boom just as boom follows bust—and contained within capitalism are the destructive seeds of inevitable recession and mass unemployment. That is the logic of the Government's argument. They are saying that, if we want to put an end to economic recession and mass unemployment, and break through to a sustained economic recovery, we must first destroy capitalism, as it contains seeds that cannot be removed. I would not wish to quarrel with that argument, but I find it strange coming from Conservatives.

The truth is that something can be done: a programme of Government action and investment as outlined by my right hon. and hon. Friends in today's debate. Capital allowances would encourage investment to improve this country's transport and infrastructure, and we could introduce special employment measures. However, the suggestions all come from Labour Members.

One of the key reforms that must be implemented if we are to break away from the present problems is constitutional reform. Within this country, a political state is developing that is so skewed by the dominance of southern constituencies that is now possible for a Tory Government to be elected on the back of southern votes and pursue policies targeted solely in the interests of people living in the southern half of the country. That policy cannot bring economic prosperity to the whole of the United Kingdom. If the Tory Government are re-elected after the next general election and they persist with that policy, the United Kingdom could be put at risk.

8.54 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): We have had a most interesting debate. Of all the speeches made, I wish to single out that of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). He tempts me to engage in a debate with him on competitive exchange rates, as he came over as a powerful advocate of floating exchange rates. However, I shall resist that temptation and latch on to something else that he said. The hon. Gentleman said that he thought that the reaction from Conservative Members had been entirely typical. I shall return that compliment: in many instances, the reaction of Opposition Members was equally typical.

One feature of such debates is their predictability. People with no experience of employing people talk about unemployment, and people with absolutely no ideas and no visions for the future talk about the recession. The stock answer from the Opposition on so many issues is more public spending—a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) in his most interesting and robust contribution. The Opposition advocate more spending on just about everything in the public sector. That argument stands up only if they are prepared to recognise that the money has to come from somewhere.

The question I want the Opposition to answer—perhaps the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) will provide an answer when he winds up—is this: if they have their way and all the additional money is found for health, education, infrastructure and all the other attributes of the state, what will be left for investment?

There is an enormous contradiction—a great inconsistency—in the argument of the Labour party. It says that it wants more investment in industry and in the wealth-creating sector—although it does not call it that, as it does not recognise trade and industry and commerce as a wealth-creating sector—but it also says that there should be more money for the public sector. It does not say where the money for the essential investment in the private sector and industry will come from. Will there be any money left in the pockets of the private investor if the Labour party comes to power?

Mr. David Evans: No.

Mr. Gill: My hon. Friend confirms my worst fears. There would be no money left for investment under a Labour Government.

In an interesting speech last night, which I commend to the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn, Hatfield, (Mr. Evans) took us down what he described as memory lane, and recited all the obstacles that previous Labour Governments had put in the way of entrepreneurs. The Labour party would do the same again were it to come to power, as its only answer to any problem is more regulation, more intervention and more regional policies —in short, preventing managers from managing, business men from running their own businesses and, as the nation now recognises, imposing higher taxes.

I should like to say in the strongest possible terms what an enormous achievement it is, and what great credit it reflects on the Government that, in a decade when hundreds of thousands of men have lost their jobs in the traditional labour-intensive industries, they have been redeployed in real jobs in the wealth-creating sector. As well as being a tribute to our Government and their policies, that is a tribute to the resilience and competence of United Kingdom employers.

How have we created those real jobs? We have done so simply through lower taxes, more realistic labour relations, deregulation, the encouragement of wealth creation and the development of a climate for investment and risk taking.

The Labour party can talk as long as it likes about throwing money at job creation, but neither it nor the public can create real jobs. The only people who can create

real, lasting, rewarding jobs are employers. I have not heard that word used once in the debate—certainly not by any Opposition Members. Employers—entrepreneurs—will identify market opportunities and make the products to fill them. They will do so at a price that the customer can afford, which will be reflected in the profits of their businesses and the prosperity of their employees.

I have been critical of the Opposition for having no vision of the future. I want to give my right hon. Friend the Minister an idea. He may have noticed within the last 24 hours the comments of the director general of the Institute of Directors, who has, correctly analysed one deficiency in our economy. He has identified a dearth of medium-sized independent companies. That is a weakness of our economy compared with the Japanese and German economies—in other words, the countries which represent our strongest competition.

I commend to my right hon. Friend the importance of encouraging medium-sized independent companies. He should spend some time considering what encouraging such companies would do to the economy. Many criticisms have been made of the economy today because of its short-term view. There are many reasons for that —our tax regime being one of them. I should like to sow in my right hon. Friend's mind the seed that he should do all that he can to encourage medium-sized independent or private businesses because of their ability to introduce stability and a longer-term view of industry into the economy.

All of that is anathema to the Labour party. It is envious and exhibits hatred of successful families and successful businesses. My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) identified that in his splendid speech. He drew the correct conclusion: that the great British public will recognise that fact when they vote in the general election. I too have no doubt that when they make that analysis, they will vote Conservative and return this Government.

9 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I make no apology for raising yet again in the House the plight of the victims of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International. I do so because, as the Government are aware, the closure of the bank last year and its subsequent liquidation on 14 January this year have had and will have an effect on the economy. Unless the Government take firm, corrective action in the next few days, some of the depositors and creditors will not be able to continue their normal and basic commercial activities because of what has happened since liquidation. Some of those people are constituents of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury; indeed, the largest single depositor is a constituent of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

As we know, when the bank was put into provisional liquidation, the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi announced that he could no longer keep on staff. Therefore, as of the end of last year, 1,200 people who were in full-time employment in the bank were put on the dole. There was no substantial compensation scheme for them. Many of them have written to me since the closure of the bank to say that despite their best endeavours they have been unable to find jobs. Many have cited comments by the Governor of the Bank of England about the nature of BCCI as the reason why they have been unable to find employment.

When the bank went into liquidation on 14 January, that was supposed to trigger the deposit protection scheme. Last year, on 8 July, when the Economic Secretary to the Treasury made to the House the statement which the Chancellor could not have made, he said that the closure of the bank would trigger the operation of the scheme, and that those with over £20,000 on deposit would be able to get a maximum of £15,000. That has not materialised.

Since my meeting with the Bank of England a few weeks ago, it has become clear that no payments will be made from the deposit protection fund until the liquidators have circulated a proof of debt form to the 40,000 depositors of BCCI resident in this country. Therefore, the payments of many businesses, which have borrowed over the last seven months in anticipation of getting money under the deposit protection scheme, will have to wait.

A promise was made to the High Court last December that by 14 January the compensation scheme, which was the result of negotiations between the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi and the liquidators, would be published. Despite that promise, the scheme has still not been published, and the anxiety, distress and concern of the thousands of depositors in this country and abroad are obvious. Almost seven months after the bank went into provisional liquidation, they have no means of knowing precisely how much money they will get.

Indeed, a report in *The Independent* today said that some depositors from Gibraltar, who have lost up to £96 million, have decided to come back to Britain because their money is frozen, they do not have any benefit scheme in Gibraltar and there is no equivalent to the deposit protection scheme there. Their arrival in this country will add to our economic problems.

All this can be sorted out if the Government take corrective action. I should like the Chief Secretary to say that he is prepared on behalf of the Government to write to the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi and the liquidators to ask them when their plan will be published. We have seen newspaper reports that the depositors may get a compensation scheme worth up to $2·2 billion. None of those reports has been corrected or confirmed by the liquidators.

Seven months after the provisional liquidation of the bank, the creditors have still not met to formally agree to the appointment of the liquidators. As the Minister will know, the four liquidators were appointed on 14 January as a result of faxes sent from the official receiver and received at the Department of Trade and Industry at 12.57 on 14 January, and a fax was sent back at 13.09, when the four liquidators were appointed. No creditors meeting has taken place. I do not want to cast aspertions on the character or performance of the four liquidators. I happen to think that both Christopher Morris and Brian Smouhar, the joint provisional liquidators, have acted properly and worked diligently trying to make sure that the negotiations proceed.

The principle here is important: the liquidators have received millions of pounds for their professional fees from this bank. It is only right that the creditors should meet at the earliest opportunity to endorse their actions. I understand that the liquidators are unhappy about such a meeting because they say that it is impossible to circulate 400,000 depositors with notice of a meeting—and that they would have to hire a very large hall if all the creditors turned up. My view is that, if it is possible for companies

[Mr. Keith Vaz]

like ICI to circulate their large number of shareholders, it is quite possible for the liquidators to circulate a notice to all the creditors.

It is vital that the liquidators call this meeting so as to be legitimised. Now that the decision rests with the Department of Trade and Industry, and now that the decision has been taken by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to appoint the liquidators, an early intervention is necessary to ensure that such a meeting is held.

It is also important that the liquidators be told of the need to proceed as a matter of urgency with writing to the depositors in this country—those who are protected by the deposit protection scheme—to enable the compensation payments to be made under that scheme. The Bank of England has told me that, on receipt of a certificate from the liquidators, it will make its payments under the deposit protection scheme within three days. The Bank tells me that it has been waiting to make these payments since 22 July last year, when 10,000 and more claim forms were sent out, but it cannot make the payments because it is still waiting for the certificates from the liquidators.

I know of many business people who cannot proceed and cannot obtain loans from other banks because the deeds forming part of their security are still being held by the old BCCI and the liquidators will not release them. There can be no set-off arrangements unless the compensation plan is discussed.

Knowing the Chief Secretary's constituency interest and the constituency interest of the Chancellor and of other right hon. and hon. Members, I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will tell us that he intends to make an early intervention to ensure that these payments are made.

It has been estimated that the closure of the bank will cost the British economy millions—some say billions—of pounds in lost exports. I believe that the Government have a duty to act now to mitigate that loss.

9.8 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): The Secretary of State for the Environment generously promised to give up his dinner in order to listen to my speech, and I see that on that issue at any rate he has been as good as his word. I know what a penance that must have been for him.

The plaudits of Conservative Members must have sounded sweet in his ears, but I suspect that his pleasure was tempered by the reflection that those plaudits were little more than a consolation prize for the manifest failure of those who cheered him today to vote for him a little more than a year ago.

As the right hon. Gentleman engaged in that private conversation with his own Back Benchers, in pursuit no doubt of his own private agenda, what a pity it was that the unemployed, the homeless or the failed business people were not here to hear him; that there was no one from those who had suffered from the recession present to hear. There would have been few plaudits from any of them, and, in truth, the Secretary of State had literally nothing to say to them.

It was clear that the right hon. Gentleman had, in effect, given away the next general election. Otherwise, why fail to address that wider electorate? As I say, he simply ignored that audience outside the House. He limited his remarks to that narrower audience on his own Back Benches. It is clear that he has a quite different election in mind and a very different electorate as well.

Although the right hon. Gentleman's speech was hardly relevant to the debate, we are making some progress. Ministers, and even the right hon. Gentleman, no longer deny that we are in recession. They no longer deny that the recession is the worst and deepest for 60 years. They no longer even pretend to discern recovery just around the corner. Even they must now fear the mocking laughter when that hollow claim is made. The green shoots which the Chancellor pretended to identify turned out to be just so much rhubarb.

The Government's only refuge now is in the assertion that our problems are just part of a worldwide recession. There was a time when patriotism was said to be the last refuge of a scoundrel. The scoundrels whom we have to deal with today clearly go further afield in order to seek their comfort. But even that claim is flatly contradicted by the facts and by the more honest of Conservative Members. In case there are those who dispute that statement, I direct their attention to the speech made by the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris).

Britain led the world into recession. We sought it out. It was the deliberate objective of policy. We were first in, we were deepest in, we are hurting worst and we have the least prospect of emerging from that recession. The truth is that our recession is the end product, the inevitable outcome, of 13 years of Tory government. It is a home-grown recession—home-grown in the sense that it was made here in Britain by a British Government, and home-grown in the sense that the homes of the British people have played a major part in creating and sustaining that recession.

No one now doubts, and no one except Ministers now disputes, that the seeds of recession were sown in the mistakes in economic policy in the late 1980s. Those mistakes were described by the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) as ending in tears. I could not have chosen a better phrase myself. In their more honest moments, and because they can find someone convenient to blame, Ministers are sometimes inclined to accept that those mistakes were made and to point the finger at the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). That is easy enough now; it is only a pity that there were so few Conservative Members who were prepared to make that criticism at the time.

Mr. Nelson: The hon. Gentleman spoke about mistakes. Will he confirm to the House his commitment, which I understand the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) has confirmed as a priority, that a Labour Government would renationalise the water companies at a price of some £4 billion? Will he also confirm whether that has been agreed with the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith)?

Mr. Gould: If the hon. Gentleman would care to do his homework—as so few of his hon. Friends are prepared to do—and to read our policy documents, he will see a very clear statement of our intention to restore the essential degree of public accountability to the way in which the water industry operates.

Let me continue on the subject of the Government's mistakes—evidently a subject on which there is an element of sensitivity on the Conservative Benches.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: No; I want to make this point.

Not everyone needed the benefit of hindsight, or a convenient scapegoat, to recognise the truth of what was happening to the economy. Some of us knew what was happening; some of us knew what terrible problems were being stored up.

In October 1988, for example, at the height of the property boom—in the midst of the triumphalism that marked so much of this period—the Chancellor was accused of building, on foundations of supply-side weakness and soaring demand, a house of cards. On that occasion, the speaker warned:

"Those cards are now teetering and trembling and cannot be sustained for much longer. When they collapse, everything will collapse and then we shall discover that the stakes in the game he has been playing have been not chips in some poker game, but real jobs, real living standards and lives."—[*Official Report*, 25 October 1988; Vol. 139, c. 256.]

It did not require much prescience for me to make that speech in the House on 28 October 1988; but even I could not have foreseen how those initial mistakes—enthusiastically supported at the time, I have no doubt, by the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, now Prime Minister—would be compounded by further mistakes made by the same right hon. Gentleman, first as Chancellor and then as Prime Minister.

How the Prime Minister must regret his complacent assertion that

"If it isn't hurting, it isn't working."

It is hurting all right, and it is hurting because the Prime Minister intended it to hurt. The problem is that it is not working—and not only is it not working; nor are those who are thrown on to the scrap heap day by day and week by week as a result of the very hurt that the Government intended.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Gould: I am not giving way for the moment.

The recession is home-grown in another sense as well. Homes, houses, the housing market, the construction industry, mortgages, repossessions—all have played a central part, first in the mistakes made by the Government, then in the corrective measures attempted by the Government and now in the hurt sustained as a result of the Government's policies.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: Not for the moment; I have limited time. If I have time, I shall give way later.

House values were the great bellows of the credit boom—fanning the flames of asset inflation, and then using those inflated values to create yet further credit. It was that unstable structure that, inevitably, came crashing down; and, again, it was the housing market that was the deliberate target of Government policy, and the chosen instrument with which the crash was brought about.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Gould: Of course Conservative Members do not want to hear what I am saying, but I invite them to sit down and listen.

Interest rates were raised to record levels; housing values slumped; the market fell; millions were caught in the trap into which they had been lured, and which was then sprung. Their repayments soared at the same time as their assets lost value. In many cases, mortgage debts exceeded the value of the properties on which the loans had been raised. Repossessions mounted; family budgets were wrecked; consumer confidence plummeted; spending stopped; demand fell; unemployment soared. Unemployment drove repossessions, and repossessions drove unemployment.

The economy was now in terrifying, dizzying, spiralling free-fall. Still the Government did nothing except, presumably, congratulate themselves that their policies were working. It was certainly hurting. This deliberate wrecking of the private housing market took place—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Gentlemen can keep up this racket and rabble for as long as they like. I shall make my speech and they will listen.

This deliberate wrecking of the private housing market took place against——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Gentleman who has the floor has made it clear that he is not giving way at present. I call Mr. Gould.

Mr. Marlow: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I make it clear that my hon. Friends have no intention of disturbing or interrupting the hon. Gentleman. We want to ask him some questions and we need some answers.

Mr. Gould: These delays will reduce the time available to the Government spokesman. I have made it clear that for the moment I do not intend to give way, and I would therefore be grateful for an absence of interventions until I am satisfied that I have had enough time to say what I have to say.

This deliberate wrecking of the private housing market took place against the background of the deliberate denial——

Mr. Butterfill: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is not it true that the conventions of the House allow an hon. Member to refuse to give way only if he is making his maiden speech? Is the hon. Gentleman claiming that he is making his maiden speech and therefore cannot be interrupted?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is a matter for the hon. Member who has the floor. I remind the House that this has been a relatively quiet debate—*[Laughter]*—for the past two or three hours and I hope that it will continue that way.

Mr. Gould: I am afraid that Conservative hon. Members are very slow learners. They do not seem to understand that the more they attempt to disrupt a speech, the less likely it is that the speaker will give way.

I was saying that the deliberate wrecking of the private housing market took place against the background of an equally deliberate denial to the construction industry of its other main source of orders in the public sector. Infrastructure contracts dried up and local authorities

[Mr. Gould]

were prevented from using their own money to build houses, with the result that last year virtually no houses were built in the public sector.

Little wonder that the construction industry is now the main engine of recession. It has shed 250,000 jobs at the rate of 1,562 a week since July 1989. Nearly 5,000 firms have gone to the wall. The trade gap in building materials has widened disastrously. The number of housing starts fell by a disastrous 37 per cent. between 1988 and 1991,. Little wonder that an industry which was once counted as the most loyal supporter of the Conservative party has now decided that it has had enough.

Let us listen to what the industry's leaders have to say. Mr. Peter Drew, chair of Taylor Woodrow, said on 4 September 1991:

"We are enduring the worst conditions for over half a century. The impact of high interest rates and a widespread lack of confidence has affected all sections of the company's business."

Mr. Terry Upsall, president of the House-Builders Federation, said on 24 July 1991:

"Government should be aware that the recession is deepening. There will be no recovery in the housing market until the end of the recession is in sight. Reliance for so long on high interest rates is driving the country into deepening recession, creating unnecessary unemployment."

On 26 July 1991, Sir Clifford Chetwood, chair of Wimpey, said:

"I have no doubt that the current recession is the worst this industry has experienced for 40 years. In the UK there are no signs of an upturn and it is hard to see how the tide can turn without a decisive move by the Government to restore confidence."

No wonder that *Builder* magazine—I quote this with special reference to the question asked by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill)—began its leading article on 10 January by saying:

"It is not the job of this magazine to tell its readers how to vote, but imagine if construction companies had the franchise —and had to exercise it in the best interests of their shareholders. Their vote would be cast for Labour."

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, because I want to ask him one simple question. If we live in a world in which people invest for profit, which is surely a sensible thing to do, how is it that in this knacker's yard of an economy—*[Interruption.]* —that is how the economy has been portrayed by Labour Members today—60 per cent. of all foreign investment in the Common Market comes to this country? Why does six times more money come to this country than goes to Germany? Why do people want to invest here—to lose money? Is it not true that the socialists are more concerned with office and the investors have got it right?

Mr. Gould: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would care to ask himself why that investment is not matched by equal investment from domestic sources. My answer to that question is that it is because Ministers make no response to the cry of pain from an industry crucial to our economic recovery.

Do Ministers recognise the need for much-needed public sector investment, as we propose? Of course they do not. Do they accept the futility of forbidding local authorities to spend their own money on desperately needed housing? Of course they do not, notwithstanding the fact that, on page 199 of the book written by the Secretary of State—clearly, he has no worries about consistency on such matters—the right hon. Gentleman rejects the current Treasury policy on the issue. Do Ministers acknowledge the damage done by using the construction industry as a sort of political balloon—inflating it irresponsibly and then puncturing it mercilessly?

The Government's answer to all those serious questions of such importance to the construction industry is the same loud raspberry that the Secretary of State blew today —the loud raspberry that the Government have blown at all those who are losing their homes, who are in bed-and-breakfast accommodation or who are sleeping rough on our streets, and at people who have lost their jobs in the construction industry.

That is the response of Ministers who no longer have any concern other than to save their own skins, Ministers who have no greater ambition than to deflect criticism by trading in selective statistics, snide comments, sneak attacks, and—in the case of the Secretary of State—reruns of his bid for the leadership of the Tory party. I shall confer a little accolade, as I am in a generous mood: the high priest in that black art is the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. It is he who is deployed to put up a smokescreen to divert attention from Government failures. We know that we cannot look to him for any grasp of the issues, understanding of the problems or compassion for the victims of the Government's recession.

It has always been a puzzle to me what the right hon. and learned Gentleman's precise role in the Cabinet is. Is he there to make the Chancellor of the Exchequer look as if he knows what he is talking about, or to make the Prime Minister seem decisive? Is he there to make the Secretary of State for Education and Science appear polite? Perhaps he is there to convey an image of the Secretary of State for the Environment as a serious politician.

Mr. Butterfill *rose——*

Mr. Gould: I conclude that the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) is there principally because of his ability to give a good news gloss to any disaster that turns up. Here he is, a man who would have hailed the sinking of the Titanic as a first in underwater exploration. Here is a man who would have greeted the black death as a necessary step towards a leaner and fitter economy. Here is a man who would have celebrated the great fire of London as a vital contribution to urban regeneration. It is no accident that it is he who will wind up the debate for the Government.

The Government could not more clearly signal their intentions to provide no answers to the real issues which matter to millions of our fellow citizens. The right hon. and learned Gentleman's role is as a promising understudy for the Secretary of State for the Environment. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is a trainee Michael Heseltine. What does that tell us about the stature of the Ministers who hide behind the right hon. and learned Gentleman's somewhat insubstantial figure—I speak figuratively of course?

We know that the Chancellor—I am glad that he has joined us—is now regarded as such a liability that he is to be kept out of the public eye at all costs. What of the Prime Minister, who appointed the Chancellor, who landed him with the problems and who now offers him no idea about how to resolve them? We shall truly be able to measure their stature when, after the election, their inadequacies

can be judged dispassionately, when they are stripped of office, when they are no longer cosseted by civil servants, when they are no longer driven in ministerial cars, and when they are no longer surrounded by red boxes and the other trappings of office. That is when they will be revealed for what they are—bumbling incompetents who are simply not up to the job.

In the meantime, what are the voters to make of that barrage of Tory propaganda to which they are now subjected? That propaganda is directly contradicted by their own personal experience. My advice to those voters is to take courage. I say to the voters, "Open your eyes, look around you and make your own assessment. Stick to your own judgment. Ask yourselves how you find the state of Britain. Ask yourselves whether you see the evidence of recession all around you. Ask yourselves whether you see evidence of people without houses and homes, whether you see people who have lost their jobs, and whether you see businesses that have failed and services that have been run down. Ask yourselves if it is really credible that a Government who have been in power for 13 years can wash their hands of what they have done and disclaim all responsibility for the disaster that has overtaken this country. Above all else, ask yourselves whether this Government, having led us into recession, have any idea of how to get us out of it and whether they show any sign of realising the enormity of what they have done."

The speech by the Secretary of State for the Environment will help enormously in making that judgment. It was a silly and frivolous speech which did not match the gravity of the nation's plight. The right hon. Gentleman may have had his tawdry triumph this afternoon——

Mr. Butterfill: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Earlier in his speech the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said that he was directing a point directly at me. He has consistently refused to give way since. I do not mind being savaged by New Zealand lamb, but I believe that he should give me the right to reply.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order for me.

Mr. Gould: It is a sign of the desperation on Conservative Benches that that is the third false point of order made by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West in the past 20 minutes. In my book, that is deliberate disruption which does the House no good.

I conclude on the subject on which I was expounding my views to the House—the pathetic apology for a speech by the Secretary of State for the Environment. The right hon. Gentleman may have had his tawdry triumph on his own Benches, but an impartial judgment will be made by all those outside who will rightly condemn a Government who have destroyed lives and hopes and who recognise no burden on their conscience as a consequence. The electorate will take the chance presented by the next general election, not long delayed now, to recall the Government to their proper responsibilities.

9.34 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. David Mellor): The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) was in excitable form, but I am not sure that he entirely obscured the fact that once again the Opposition have chosen a day for a debate on the economy and found nothing whatever to say. The hon. Gentleman ribbed me about what might be in my speech, but he did not set me an elevated example with a speech that was entirely devoid of any policy commitment. When he was asked a straight question about what one of his junior spokesmen had said was a priority for the Labour party—renationalisation of the water industry—he ducked the question in a way that would not have done credit to someone in a fifth-form debating society.

The debate has revealed the Labour party's split personality—on the one hand, the conventional speeches of orthodoxy from the Front Bench, but on the other, Back Benchers seething with discontent, as we read in *The Guardian* today. Hollow unconvincing laughter does not prevent the discontent from showing through.

Then there is the split personality of the hon. Member for Dagenham. He shed crocodile tears about the poor state of the nation while undoubtedly still savouring the £500-a-plate dinner that he had the other night at the Park Lane hotel. If he can deliver that many fat cats to pay that kind of money for the Labour party, he must be doing something right. However, at least that dinner proved that the Leader of the Opposition is capable of learning from his experiences. It is the first dinner that he has ever attended where he opened his mouth only to eat.

Mr. John Smith: Very poor.

Mr. Mellor: The right hon. and learned Gentleman says, "Very poor." Well, he is an expert. I shall try to do better. I am working on it.

The debate was not a triumph for the Labour party, first, because its analysis is incredible to the general public, as is obvious from the opinion polls. The Labour party has failed to acknowledge what everyone knows to be the reality in the world about us. Secondly, the public are much more interested in looking ahead to see what policies are on offer. In no respect do they find the Labour party's policy convincing. Indeed, the Opposition spokesmen cannot even agree what their policy is in crucial areas of spending and taxation.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East quoted with approval the Governor of the Bank of England. One is never sure where the Governor of the Bank of England stands with the Labour party. As Disraeli once said, it is never quite sure whether to blacken his character or blacken his boots. Today was a day for blackening his boots so perhaps I might remind the House of what he said in a speech yesterday about the international situation. He said:

> "The slowdown in the world economy appears to have spread now to all of the major economies. It has been particularly evident in the United States where, despite the authorities' actions, the recovery which seemed in prospect in early summer appears now to have dissipated. In fact, output appears to have risen hardly at all in the final quarter of the year. Western Germany has also ceased to grow after its post-unification rise in output, while in France and Italy activity has remained weak. Even Japan is experiencing a notable slowing in the pace of GDP growth."—

[HON. MEMBERS: "Boring."] It may be boring but it is the truth—a truth which the Opposition dare not countenance because the flimsy house of cards which is their policy falls apart once the reality of the situation is known.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I shall not give way. I want to press on.

How can the Opposition deny that Germany is in recession? Today *The Times* stated:

[Mr. Mellor]

"Germany is in a full-fledged recession, with unemployment the highest since the Weimar republic and with industrial production having fallen by over 3 per cent. in December alone."

How many of those who have watched the coverage of the United States presidential primary in New Hampshire can deny the problems of the United States economy, where the motor industry contracted by 8 per cent. last month? The Opposition make play of the losses made by Ford, but Ford in the United States lost £2·2 billion last year. Manufacturing production there fell by 1 per cent. last month.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: I shall ask my hon. Friend and question similar to the one that I asked the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), who seemed shy to answer. If it is true that our economy is so bad and that this country really is in the knacker's yard, why do 60 per cent. of investors, who have to make a profit, come to this country? That is six times the number going to Germany and three times the number going to France. Would my right hon. and learned Friend rather trust an investor or those people who are aching for office? Who is likely to do the right thing?

Mr. Mellor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those relevant remarks. If one considers figures for international investment in the United Kingdom, one finds that, at constant 1990 prices, in the six years to 1989 there was nearly £8 billion of inward investment from the United States, culminating in an investment of more than £4 billion in 1989. What was the figure during the last full year of the last Labour Government? In 1978, it was £321 million. That is the difference. Consider the figures for Japan. In 1987, there was £657 million of investment from Japan; in 1988, it was £768 million; and, in 1989, it was £1·12 billion. What was the figure in the last year of the last Labour Government? In 1978, it was minus £10 million. That is the difference between our record and that of the Labour Government.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Does the Minister accept that this country has been in uninterrupted recession for six quarters? No other major industrial economy has faced that situation. I agree that other economies are slowing down and perhaps going through recession, but that does not make it right that we have been in recession for a year and a half and have no prospect of coming out of it. That only reinforces the need to do something about it. What does he intend to do?

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman sounds as confused as when he was mismanaging Jaguar all those years ago. He is wrong. Australia, Canada and Sweden have all been in recession for longer. If he is interested, I will give him the figures. Since the beginning of 1990, only two of the 14 largest economies—Japan and Denmark—have never experienced a quarter on quarter fall. Six quarters for 14 economies amount to 84 movements and 34 of them have been downwards. That is a sign of the extent of international problems.

Mr. Gould: Since the hon. Gentleman is clearly a master of this part of his brief at any rate, can he tell us which of the countries to which he referred has enjoyed or suffered six successive quarters of officially defined recession?

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman is such a master of his brief that he cannot even put the British position right. We have not had six successive quarters of falling growth. Growth did not fall in the third quarter of last year.

Mr. Gould: Answer the question.

Mr. Mellor: I have given the answer. I have told the hon. Gentleman that his premise is completely false. He should leave others to decide who is on top of their brief.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. The Opposition find themselves in the eminently discreditable position of having to talk down not only the efforts of the Government, but those of many other people in our economy who have performed well. It is not just we who object to that. Did the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East and the hon. Member for Dagenham see the speech made by Sir John Banham yesterday? He said:

"incessant politicisation"

of the economic situation was causing the very lack of confidence that

"is at the root of the current recession . . . We are building the right partnership for Government and industry."

Mr. Gould: Let us have the election.

Mr. Mellor: I think that the hon. Gentleman will get this election. If the speech that he made was a dry run for what he intends to say then, he has every reason to be worried about the outcome.

The climate for recovery has been established. Inflation is at 4·1 per cent., within a tenth of a percentage point of Germany's inflation rate. Producer prices are the lowest for a quarter of a century and interest rates have come down by 4·5 per cent. from their peak. Interest rates in this country have experienced seven downward movements, while German rates have gone up 4 per cent.

I notice that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East has reverted to one of his more facile arguments, as he is again calling for a reduction in interest rates. He had gone off that argument for some time. The right hon. and learned Gentleman was extremely querulous about noise when he was speaking. It would be interesting to know if he now has an answer about interest rates.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman may call for a reduction in interest rates, but is he aware that Crédit Lyonnais has calculated that interest rates will increase by 4 per cent. under a Labour Government? The London Business School has said that a Labour Government would put up interest rates by up to 3 per cent. Kleinwort Benson has calculated that interest rates would rise by between 2 and 4 per cent. DKB bank and Nomura Research Institute have calculated that they would go up by 2 per cent. The right hon. and learned Gentleman may ignore those calculations, but the public will not. James Capel and Barclays de Zoete Wedd have said that they will increase by 1 per cent. UBS Phillips and Drew, Midland Montagu, Goldman Sachs and the Confederation of British Industry have all said that interest rates would rise under Labour. That is why the Labour party is not trusted. The right hon. and learned Gentleman's puerile response does him no credit.

Conditions for recovery exist, but the Labour party has no policies to improve them—it would make them worse.

Let us consider what the Labour party proposes for the business community—the 28 ways in which it proposes to increase the burdens on business. Social audits would interfere with investment decisions. Labour would return to the trade unions the power of secondary picketing and remove from the courts the right to sequestrate the assets of trade unions.

How many people want to go back to the days when flying pickets held the nation to ransom? What does the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East say about the fact that, in 1991, 800,000 days were lost in industrial disputes whereas in 1979, 29 million days were lost? What has the Labour party learnt about the problems that can be caused by out of control trade unions? Some people put their mistakes behind them. The Labour party puts its mistakes into policy documents and seeks to give the kiss of life to ideas that were the kiss of death in the 1970s.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): The Government having decided to abolish wages councils, do they believe in a low wage economy for British people?

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman must bear in mind the fact that the consequences of the Labour alternative—the minimum wage—would massively increase unemployment. That is not just the view of Conservative Members but of leading figures in the trade unions. Only one newspaper supported Labour party policy on the minimum wage, and that was the *Morning Star*.

Mr. Campbell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I asked the Minister a question and he has not given me an answer. Does he believe in a low wage economy for the British people? I have not had an answer to that question.

Mr. Speaker: It frequently happens.

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) is well past his yell-by date. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."]

We had the commendation from Labour Front Bench spokesmen of the social charter, which would prevent Mr. Delors's greatest fear—that Britain would be a paradise for inward investment. That would worry Labour Members if they were rational. Just as the Labour party is trying to advocate the social charter, we learn from the *Financial Times* today that the Germans are proposing to move away from it. Talking about a package of measures designed to improve inward investment into Germany drawn up by the Economics Ministry, it said:

"The package is an attempt to meet the growing chorus of complaints from German industry that high wage and tax costs and an excessive burden of social and environmental spending are driving German and foreign investors alike away from the market."

What is happening is typical of Labour Members. They cannot tell the difference between a bandwagon and a sinking ship, and they are leaping on to the idea of the social charter just as people in Europe are beginning to realise that it does not work.

The Labour party has no serious answers on those issues. One simply gets bogus propositions, such as the recovery package that is supposed to cost £1 billion, £800 million of which is to be on training. Perhaps the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East can answer an important question. Is £800 million on training and an extra £200 million on other matters supposed to be able to transform an economy of £600 billion, with over £200 billion of public expenditure? The whole thing is risible and an insult to the intelligence of the British public.

It becomes even more of a nonsense when one considers that the Labour party proposes to pay all trainees on training schemes the minimum wage. So unless Labour is prepared to cut the number of trainees, out of that £800 million extra more than £600 million will have to go to top up the amount of money paid to trainees, with no benefit whatever. What is Labour's answer to that? If the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East will cease his selective reading of the Secretary of State's book, he might care to answer that question.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman, who is not having good week—even his hon. Friends are getting dissatisfied with him—will be thought to be clowning around when he goes before the public with a recovery package of £1 billion and it turns out that more than £600 million of it will be needed to top up the money going to existing trainees and will not add one to the number of people being trained.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman, who has not been present for most of the debate.

Labour cannot even agree on whether the recovery package will be a priority. The deputy leader of the Labour party said that the recovery package would be paid for only when the recovery had taken place. I sometimes think that the right hon. Gentleman, who spends half his time as a novelist and half as a politician, is getting his roles confused. It is the novels he should be making up as he goes along, not the politics.

Mr. Dicks: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the leader of the Labour party said recently on television that the recovery package would take place as a result of economic growth? In other words, if there is economic growth after four or five years, that is when Labour would introduce its recovery package.

Mr. Mellor: Exactly.

In the past two weeks, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, the hon. Members for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) and for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) twice, have tried to answer the simple question whether that so-called recovery package, which is entirely bogus, will be introduced straight away, but they cannot agree among themselves. No wonder the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East had to acknowledge today what a muddle and a mess the Labour party is in. He had to admit that it is about to produce a document which sets out its spending plans and the tax implications of those. So the Labour party will not produce a document just yet.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): Will the Chief Secretary answer one simple question? When will his own recovery programme be implemented?

Mr. Mellor: Everyone in the forecasting community accepts—the Governor of the Bank of England said so yesterday—that there will be a recovery during the course of this year. That would not happen if there were the kind of programme that the Labour party wants to carry into effect. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."]

[Mr. Mellor]

If the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East has reached the conclusion, after the mess and confusion of the past few weeks, that he now needs to produce a document to say what Labour will spend and what that will cost in taxation, why does he not produce it now? Why must he wait?

I was interested to see a Labour party publication entitled "Woman Today" with a competition which says:

"Win a day in Parliament. All you have to do is say in no more than 100 words what you think the priorities of a Labour government should be".

So we know that we must wait until those good ladies have sent in their answers before the right hon. and learned Gentleman can produce his document. We really want to know not what people must do to win a day in Parliament but what they must do to win a dinner at Luigi's. Perhaps they must make Labour's tax plans add up.

No amount of bluster and continuous talking will allow the right hon. and learned Gentleman to escape from the fact that he cannot bring home the bacon for his hon. Friends, as a result of which they are mouthing their dissatisfaction to the press. They are prepared to put up with the orthodoxy so long as it looks as though it will deliver electoral victory.

Labour's tax plans do not convince. They would commend themselves only to the boxing promoter responsible for finding Mr. Frank Bruno's next opponent, because they are guaranteed to stand up for not more than three minutes. In every test for a credible alternative Government, the Labour party has failed to find a policy that remotely commends itself to anybody who believes in the recovery of this country.

The fact is that in recent months we have increased our exports to other European countries by 5 per cent., that for the third year running our share of world trade in manufactures has increased, and that we have a climate fully competitive with that anywhere else in the European Community. All that would be put at risk by the Labour party's tax-and-spend policies. Today the Opposition have had yet another opportunity to prove that they are fit for office, and they have taken yet another opportunity to prove that manifestly they are not.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 211, Noes 311.

Division No. 87] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.

Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann

Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments)*:—

The House divided: Ayes 309, Noes 208.

Division No. 88] **[10.12 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard

Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates Her Majesty's Government on its success in winning the battle against inflation and in bringing interest rates down; welcomes the recent reduction in the balance of payments deficit and the fact that exports are at record levels; notes that the United Kingdom has some of the most competitive tax rates in the world, including the lowest level of corporation tax in either the G7 or the European Community and that Government spending on training has increased by two and a half times over and above the rate of inflation since 1979; recognises that the foundations for economic recovery are now firmly laid; and rejects totally the policies of the Opposition, which would lead to soaring inflation, greater public sector borrowing, higher taxation, increased unemployment, rising interest rates, declining investment and a spiralling cycle of higher wages and prices which would destroy any prospect of recovery and plunge Britain into perpetual recession.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 24th February, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), Mr. Speaker shall put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. Secretary Baker relating to Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism not later than Seven o'clock.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

PARLIAMENTARY CORPORATE BODIES BILL

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Parliamentary Corporate Bodies Bill, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

PETITION

Sunday Trading

10.25 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I beg leave to present a petition about Sunday trading. The petition has been signed by the chairman and members of the Penarth Cytyn—that is, the Penarth council of churches—and, in a very short time, by well over 1,300 other people, including all the bishops of the Church in Wales, who say that the decision of the Attorney-General to take no action on illegal Sunday trading has been seen as a licence for the law to be ignored with impunity while putting pressure on law-abiding retailers also to open on Sundays, or to suffer an unfair loss of their market share.

The petition reminds Ministers of their duty to uphold the law, and urges that the law be modernised quickly in a way that deals fairly with employees, their families and with community and commercial interests, based on the REST proposals of the Keep Sunday Special campaign. It therefore calls on the House to require that the law be enforced until such time as it is amended, which the petitioners urge shall be based on the REST proposals.

To lie upon the Table.

Steel Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

10.27 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I am grateful for the opportunity to express my concern about the future of the British steel industry, both nationally and, in particular, in my constituency.

Since the privatisation of the industry in 1988, the Scunthorpe general steel works has experienced almost constant job losses. More than 1,000 craft and production jobs have gone over the past year. Since the early 1980s, the number employed in the industry in Glanford and Scunthorpe has declined from more than 20,000 to around 6,000.

The Scunthorpe works has responded to those changes in a way that has brought about record iron and steel production and record productivity. A great deal of sacrifice has been made by the workers at every level in the works to ensure that it remains competitive and performs well, in a national and an international context.

The question now is this. For all that sacrifice in terms of jobs, and for all those gains in terms of productivity, what has been the reward for the work force—and, indeed, for the town that surrounds the works? It has now been announced that British Steel intends to invest in a new plate mill. I believe—and recent rumours confirm it—that a study of the site of the plate mill established that the Scunthorpe works had a great deal of merit, and was a strong contender.

My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) is in the Chamber. I do not want to deprive her of the pleasure that people on Teesside must feel about the fact that it has been named in connection with the plate mill investment. As individuals, we have worked together to defend not only the interests of our constituencies, but those of steel in general.

However, since privatisation there has been a move away from identifying investment in the Scunthorpe works to retrenchment. There has been a great deal of contracting out at those works as there has been at all steel plants. At Scunthorpe, even the security and emergency services have been put out to contract and that has, of course, caused concern given the very high quality of service provided in the past. I am pleased that the manager of the Scunthorpe works has given me personal assurances that that quality of service will not deteriorate.

Nevertheless, in view of the extent of the contracting out, it is inevitable that people who work at the plant feel that there is a lack of job security. That is not helped when they see investment by British Steel—now privatised—going to companies abroad to obtain the best return on capital. I understand that British Steel management have to operate under certain rules, but the management have shown a ruthlessness and lack of concern for the work force's commitment in the various plants over the years.

In all fairness, I am grateful to Sir Robert Scholey, the chairman of British Steel, and to Brian Moffat, the chief executive, for their frankness in my discussions with them and for their willingness to meet to discuss these issues. I also pay tribute to Gerry Gorman, who was the former manager of the Scunthorpe plant and the present manager, Stuart Pettifor. They have also been helpful in responding to requests and have generally managed the works very responsibly.

The Government must share responsibility because when they privatised the steel industry they cut it adrift and washed their hands of it, leaving it to sink or swim. Steel is the powerhouse of manufacturing in this country. Its role is strategic as well as commercial. To lose our steel-making capacity means losing our place as a manufacturing nation. Do we want our industrial heritage destroyed and to end up as an assembly-line nation putting together goods designed and manufactured abroad? That is already happening.

The matter was brought to a head and my constituents' fears were underlined by a comment made by the chief executive, Mr. Moffat. In an interview, he said that the Scunthorpe works could end up finishing imported Brazilian billet. I do not want to take Mr. Moffat's comments out of context—he made it clear that he was talking about the long term and that he did not expect that to happen in his lifetime—but one can understand how they have not helped morale at the Scunthorpe works. People feel that, despite the gains that it has made in productivity, the works' future lies in finishing imported Brazilian steel.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): Does my hon. Friend agree that an additional problem for British Steel is the depth and seriousness of the present recession, which has led to the difficulties of playing one area—his own in Scunthorpe—off against another—mine in Teesside? That is the last thing that the Labour party want. We want to support British Steel in a diversified policy which develops different regions, rather than producing the appalling situation in which one region is played off against another.

Mr. Morley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. My predecessor, who was a Conservative Member of Parliament viciously attacked the Ravenscraig steel industry before 1987, and succeeded only in setting one steel plant against another. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for supporting me tonight and for the way in which she has worked with me and our two communities—two Labour Members of Parliament working together—to try to represent the best interests of those communities and the future of steel in manufacturing.

Steel is a capital-intensive industry which is prone to cycles of production. The privatisation of steel does not have a good record. Previous privatisations led to asset stripping and under-investment. The jury is still out on this privatisation in terms of investment by British Steel in its plants, but I am worried that, although there has been a great deal of investment in the primary end of British Steel, there has not been a great deal so far in the downstream part of its production. Financially, steel has not performed noticeably better under private ownership than under public ownership.

Within the Scunthorpe works are two private steel works—United Merchant Bar and Allied Steel and Wire. They have both recently received the Queen's award for industry, and they are both successful and important to our community. Those two companies are dependent on the Scunthorpe works for the supply of their billet and part

[Mr. Morley]

of their energy. They are an integrated part of the works—indeed, they were formerly part of those works until they were sold to the separate companies.

When the Government privatised British Steel, they gave it monopoly power. At the time, I accepted that it was probably better to sell the organisation as an integrated company than to break it up into individual plants—and I imagine that that is still true today. However, if viable individual steel plants are threatened with closure and with being sold off, there is a case for examining British Steel's current monopoly in those areas.

British Steel's current profits are about the same as they were before privatisation—about £200 million, which they were in 1987. They are certainly lower than the £400 million that it produced in 1988, under public ownership. Although time has moved on, demand and sales were similar in both periods, and exports are slightly higher.

As I have said, there has been much investment in the primary end of the business, and that makes Mr. Moffat's comments all the more strange. To talk about importing steel into what is, in terms of liquid steel and iron production, one of the most efficient steel works in the world, puzzles local workers and other constituents. I share their concern.

British Steel would be the first to point out that it has to operate in the current economic climate. The Government must take its share of the blame for that climate, and therefore for the decline in steel. The company has to depend on the energy prices laid down by the Government, and energy and water costs in Britain are artificially high; they have been inflated by the Government's dogmatic adherence to privatisation.

It is no use blaming the world recession—we have heard a great deal of that in recent weeks. British Steel says that, although there has been a slackening in the demand for steel in world markets, that slackening has been about 5 per cent. in America, Japan and the rest of Europe, while in the United Kingdom there has been a drop of between 16 and 17 per cent.—nearly three times the drop in world demand.

The Government must also take responsibility for their general level of economic incompetence. They have imposed high interest rates, which have crippled industry, and they have given manufacturing industry a low priority. Thirty-four jobs in the manufacturing sector have disappeared for every hour of the day and night since 1979, when the Labour Government were in power. Since 1979, 2,387,000 jobs in manufacturing have gone, 9,400 apprenticeships have gone, and unemployment has increased in 22 consecutive months—that is well above the EC average.

Britain is the only country in the EC where manufacturing activity is lower than it was in 1979. We have the lowest rate of research and development in the EC. This country never had a trade deficit under the Labour Government; since 1983 it has never had a surplus. That is an appalling record.

In my constituency all the local councils have done their best to react to the changes. Until last year they had great success. Scunthorpe council was held up as a model council for attracting company after company to the area. It has done a good job, for which it deserves credit. That activity has cut unemployment from its peak, and I acknowledge the Government grants received because of our assisted area status, which, with contributions from the EC, have been vital to the process.

Even so, according to the Government's calculations, there was a 44 per cent. reduction in unemployment between January 1984 and January 1992. You will be aware, Mr. Speaker, that the Government have changed the method of calculating unemployment at least 22 times, to my knowledge, and I have now lost count. The fairest way to compare the drop in unemployment is to use the former methods of calculation which have been prepared for me by the Unemployment Unit.

Under the former methods of calcuation, the drop in unemployment between January 1984 and January 1992 is 29·2 per cent.—considerably less than under the present calculations. That trend is now reversing. Under the official Department of Employment count, between January 1991 and January 1992, unemployment has increased in Glanford and Scunthorpe by 29·2 per cent.—exactly the decline in unemployment from 1984. We are back almost to where we were in 1984. The calculations are a matter of concern to my constituency and to the local economy. Glanford and Scunthorpe has used the available Government grants wisely, and the grants have been vital in trying to combat the change.

More than 1,000 jobs in the steel industry have gone in the past year. Of those, about two thirds went through early retirement. I am concerned—I hope that the Minister will take note of this—that those who have left employment in the steel industry through early retirement do not show up in the official statistics. There is a great deal of hidden unemployment in the area. Unemployment is worse than it appears to be in the figures. Although people have left the industry because of early retirement or retirement due to ill health, those jobs have gone for good and future generations will be denied them.

I appeal to the Minister to recognise that and to ensure that the support in Government grants through assisted area status is maintained because it is vital to the area. Even more vital, given people's insecurity about the future of steel, is that we ensure that we have job opportunities and that we widen the employment base in the constituency so that the area is not as reliant as it once was on the steel industry.

We have a Budget in a few weeks' time. We need a Budget for jobs and manufacturing. What we do not want is a 1p in the pound tax cut gimmick in a vain attempt to try to keep this Government in power. I believe that such a move will rebound on the Government because people will see through it and they will recognise that such money can be spent in far better ways for the future prosperity of our country.

We need investment in our infrastructure. We need, for example, proper high-speed rail links and freight terminals to take advantage of the channel tunnel. Our rail network is a laughing stock compared with those of France and Germany with their high-speed links. I hear tonight that British Rail has had to cancel a £150 million order for new rolling stock. That new rolling stock would have taken constructional steel from the Scunthorpe works. Not only will the commuters of the south-east have to put up with substandard rolling stock for a further year, but jobs will be lost in York in the construction of those trains and jobs will be threatened in the steel industry which would have produced the steel required.

We need more homes, and there is a desperate need for decent homes to rent. The construction industry needs a boost—kick-start—in the Budget. Councils need to be set free from the straitjacket of regulations. There is no reason why the councils that are sitting on capital receipts from council house sales should not be allowed to use that money to buy much-needed homes to rent. Industry needs tax help for investment in capital machinery.

Steel is not prospering under this Government. While they are committed to a hands-off and blinkered approach, we face unfair competition from Europe, where Governments are far more inclined to intervene in their economies to ensure that they are strong and competitive. There is an element of unfair competition in Europe in terms of subsidised energy and transport, and because other Governments have not made the same strides to reduce steel capacity. While that goes on, our steel industry is put at an even bigger disadvantage.

We need a Government committed to manufacturing strength, prosperity and investment in the future. If that cannot be done by this Government, the sooner they make way for a Labour Government who will do it, the better it will be for all concerned.

10.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): The future of the steel industry, like that of any other industry, depends on its competitiveness. Over the past decade, the United Kingdom steel industry has proved itself. British Steel has emerged as a company of the future, not the relic of the past which was the Labour Government's legacy.

It is understandable that British Steel's recent decision to end steel making at Ravenscraig should have led to concern about the future of the company's other plants. The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) has a special interest in the Scunthorpe plant. Those who work there are among his constituents—and mine down the road at Gainsborough. He has a sincere and legitimate concern for their future. He is entitled to put his views, as he has done in the Adjournment debate today, but it is for me to put matters into context.

Scunthorpe is a highly productive and efficient plant. Its integrated operation has been continuously strengthened. Coke ovens were recently rebuilt further to reduce costs and improve quality. The Queens blast furnaces, which are a characteristic feature of the Scunthorpe works, have been successfully reconstructed. Two have been completed in recent years and a third is due for completion towards the end of this year. This will ensure effective iron-making at Scunthorpe for the foreseeable future.

British Steel has made it clear that the recent decision to end steel making at Ravenscraig will have no effect on either of the existing plate mills at Dalzell or Scunthorpe. The hon. Gentleman referred to British Steel's plans to build a new plate mill at Teesside to replace the existing mills at Scunthorpe and Dalzell. I understand that those plans have been put on ice for the present until future market demands are clearer.

The hon. Gentleman is aware of comments by British Steel's chief executive recently reported in the press to the effect that future investment is likely to be concentrated at a smaller number of integrated plants—notably at Teesside and Port Talbot. These comments made it clear that the Scunthorpe plant is likely to have a long life. We should stress that point.

It is most unlikely that, in an industry where demand patterns are changing rapidly, with greater emphasis now placed on quality and finishing, supply patterns will remain completely unaltered. The important thing is that British Steel sees a long-term future for the Scunthorpe plant. I underline that point. So I believe that these comments are good news for those among the hon. Gentleman's constituents who work there. In order to survive, the plant will have to meet the needs of the market. That applies to a manufacturing operation in the steel industry, just as in any other industry.

Of course, Scunthorpe today does not just mean the steel industry. The attractions of the area have been recognised by a growing number of businesses. As the hon. Member well knows, I was in his constituency only a few months ago to open a new factory. In the past decade, Scunthorpe has seen the creation of many new jobs. Since May 1979, over 21,000 jobs have been created by just those investments which have attracted Department of Trade and Industry regional assistance.

Of course, I noted the hon. Gentleman's point about the need to continue the assistance programme. As he knows, we will have a review early in the next Parliament. The needs of Scunthorpe will be examined in an entirely objective way, just as the needs of Teesside and other areas will be examined. We will base our decisions on, for example, the unemployment figures, the peripherality of the area and other such indices to ensure that the assistance goes to those areas which need it most.

But, of course, the hon. Gentleman is right. Scunthorpe has been an enormous success story in the past 12 years. The area faced severe problems with the rundown of the steel industry but it has been a great success story. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will pay tribute to that. The area has seen substantial growth in inward investment and new business formation in recent years. That trend continues to contribute to the increasing diversification of the local economy. One part of the hon. Gentleman's speech with which I, and indeed the whole Government Front Bench, agreed was when he stressed the importance of the need to diversify the Scunthorpe economy.

Relocations, expansions and new investment in sectors such as furniture, electronics, food and chemicals have all helped Scunthorpe to move towards a more balanced economy. I am sure that the hon. Member welcomes that.

I believe that the hon. Member recognises that the Scunthorpe plant must be viewed in the context of British Steel's overall operations and of the industry. I hope that the hon. Member will forgive me but, as the motion for the Adjournment refers not merely to the Scunthorpe plant but to the industry, in the few remaining moments I should like to say a few words about British Steel's wider operations.

Since 1979, the steel industry's productivity has tripled. In 1979, British Steel took more than 13 man hours to produce one tonne of liquid steel. Today, it takes less than five man hours. Over the same period, market needs have altered substantially. British Steel has adapted aggressively. Investment in modern plant and techniques has made British Steel one of the few European steel-makers able to offer a full range of steels which meet the requirements of motor industry customers in the 1990s.

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

It is no coincidence that those improvements have gone hand in hand with increased exports. Exports of finished steel have increased from 4 million tonnes in 1979 to 6·5 million tonnes in 1990—an increase of more than 50 per cent. During the same period, the proportion of production exported went up from 24 per cent. to 40 per cent. That is a record second to none. Those of us attending this debate should pay tribute to British Steel for its amazing record of improving productivity and exports.

Mr. Morley: I certainly concede that British Steel has an enviable performance record. However, I am sure that the Minister can understand that, when the people within British Steel who were responsible for that—through their commitment, productivity and the work that they have done within the industry—see British Steel negotiating with, for example, Bethlehem Steel in America for investment there, one can understand that what worries them is that the investment that they feel ought to go to our United Kingdom plants might be siphoned off into investments in other countries, to the detriment of their jobs and futures. The Minister must understand their concern about that situation.

Mr. Leigh: It is always right for a Member of Parliament to express concern on behalf of his constituents. We all understand that. However, we must consider British Steel's record and the way in which it has managed to increase productivity and output. It is a sad fact of life that the number of people employed in the British steel industry, as in manufacturing generally, has declined continuously since the 1950s. That is a fact of life that we cannot escape. I am sure that the hon. Member, who is a pragmatic member of the Labour party, realises that that is a fact of life.

Unfortunately, we can now produce more steel, more efficiently, employing fewer people. It would be dangerous for me as a Minister, or for the hon. Gentleman—who perhaps hopes to be standing in my position in a few weeks—to second-guess the commercial decisions of British Steel. Were we to do so, we could well spin British Steel into uncompetitiveness, and in the long run, that could lose more jobs.

We must recognise British Steel's enormous success since it was freed from the shackles of Government control. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not one of those people who want to return to the bad old days when British Steel lost about £16 billion—in modern money. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, who is a pragmatic, modern-minded, progressive-minded member of the Labour party, does not want to return to those days.

Ms. Mowlam: In view of the Minister's argument and his emphasis on the importance of pragmatism, and as he has just argued that manufacturing jobs have declined consistently since the 1950s, will he explain the reasons for that continual decline? What is his projection for jobs in manufacturing in the next decade?

Mr. Leigh: I cannot, of course, look into a crystal ball to foresee what will happen in the next two decades. However, something very interesting has already happened. Although, sadly, the number of people employed in manufacturing industry has declined under Labour and Conservative Governments—and under all European Governments—since the 1950s, since the late 1970s things have changed. As a result of our policies, output has increased by a quarter, investment has increased by a third, productivity has increased by a half, and export volumes have increased by more than two thirds. Those achievements result from our policies, which have freed British industry from the type of controls under which it was shackled by the Labour Government.

The debate is in danger of becoming party political, and that was not my aim. I digressed from my excellent text, but I shall return to it. Today, British Steel is more efficient than it has ever been. It is geared to adapt rapidly to changing market needs and it is exporting more than it has ever exported. It is in an immeasurably stronger position to face the future than it was when the Labour party left office.

British Steel's commercial and industrial strategy is a matter for the company, not for the Government. The Government believe that the national interest is best served by allowing companies to manage their own affairs. That applies to the steel industry just as it does to any other industry. It has been vindicated by British Steel's performance since privatisation, which by any standards has been impressive.

British Steel, like any other private-sector company, is responsible to its shareholders for its performance. The company has made clear its intention to continue its efforts to reduce costs in order to remain competitive. The deterioration in market conditions—with continuing over-capacity across Europe and general price weakness—has made cost-competitiveness even more important. Companies which do not compete and do not adapt to the needs of the market will not survive: it is as simple as that. There is no other way.

It is clear that 1992 will not be an easy year. Much will depend on those industries—construction, engineering, motor manufacture—which are major customers for steel. Producers will be operating in a highly competitive environment. To succeed, they will need to continue to reduce costs, to rationalise their operations, to modernise and to improve quality.

British Steel is doing all that. It is now one of the most efficient producers of steel in the world. There is every reason to be optimistic about the future of the company and, I believe, about the part that Scunthorpe can play in that future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 20 February 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) BILL *(By Order)*

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read a Third time on Monday 24 February at Seven o'clock.

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (GREEN PARK) BILL *(By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Monday 24 February at Seven o'Clock.

ALLIANCE AND LEICESTER (GIROBANK) BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 4) BILL *(By Order)*

CROSSRAIL BILL *(By Order)*

EAST COAST MAIN LINE SAFETY BILL *(By Order)*

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (JUBILEE) BILL *(By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 27 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Authorities

1. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to introduce direct elections to police authorities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): We have no plans to change the existing arrangements for the constitution of police authorities, where two thirds of the members are local councillors and one third are local magistrates.

Mr. Paice: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in a recent opinion poll only 8 per cent. of the respondents supported the idea that police authorities should consist only of elected members? Is it surprising that the public should resist such an attempt to politicise the police, despite the fact that it is the policy of the Opposition?

Mr. Baker: As far as I can see, it is the only policy that will appear in Labour's manifesto, in that Labour want fully elected police authorities. There is no popular support for that and there is no evidence that policing is made more effective by tinkering with the membership of the police authority. In my judgment, magistrates add an important element of non-political independence to any police authority and they help to improve the effectiveness of that authority. We remain strongly opposed to bringing police forces under total local political control.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the Secretary of State aware that in London there is a majority in favour of Labour's proposal to set up an elected police authority for the Greater London area? We already have one elected police authority in London—in the City of London. Is the Secretary of State further aware that the proposal is welcomed not only by the majority of Londoners, but by all the senior officers of Scotland Yard? What has he got to say to that?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman totally misrepresents that opinion of senior police officers of the Metropolitan police. I know perfectly well that when he was chairman of the Greater London council he wanted an elected police authority, and I think that he wanted to be chairman of it——

Mr. Tony Banks: No.

Mr. Baker: I can think of nothing more damaging to law and order in the metropolis than having the hon. Gentleman as chairman of such an authority.

Mr. Tony Banks: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Home Secretary has just misled the House. He is a liar.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must withdraw that comment, even though I was on my feet.

Mr. Banks: If the Secretary of State withdraws his allegation, I will withdraw my accusation.

Mr. Speaker: Order. No ifs and buts, please.

Mr. Banks: I called the Home Secretary a liar. It is true and I regret it.

Mr. Speaker: That compounds the offence. The hon. Gentleman must not call an hon. Member a liar.

Mr. Banks: I withdraw it, Sir.

Police Expenditure

2. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the extra police expenditure resulting from the War Crimes Act 1991.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): Additional police expenditure associated with the War Crimes Act 1991 is estimated at £930,000 for 1991-92.

Mr. Townsend: On reflection, does my right hon. Friend agree that precious police resources—the figure of £2 million has been mentioned—should not be used on vindictive, Soviet or Israeli-type show trials which are bound to be a travesty of British justice as practised by this country for a long time? Should not the money be used instead to deal with rapists, murderers and muggers in my constituency and in other parts of Greater London today?

Mr. Patten: There are two points there. I respect my hon. Friend's strong personal feelings, but I point out to him that Parliament has expressed its view very strongly. It is now up to those charged with the duty of investigating alleged crimes to do so. My hon. Friend knows as well as I do that no Government have brought the police force to such a level as this Conservative Government have done. It is better manned, it has more resources and it is better equipped than any police force in British history.

Mr. Winnick: I totally disagree with what the Minister said about police resources. We know only too well of the crime wave in this country.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that last Friday, on a delegation to Kiev, I took the opportunity—as I had always promised myself that I would if ever I were in Kiev—to visit Babi Yar, just outside the city limits, where in two years of Nazi terror and occupation tens of thousands of people were murdered? There is a monument to those who fell—men, women, children, babes in arms and the aged. Why should those responsible for such crimes and atrocities against humanity go scot free because they have managed to escape justice for 50 years?

Mr. Patten: I appreciate the effect that the hon. Gentleman's visit, of which I was not aware, must have had on him. Parliament has already expressed its view that investigations should proceed and, if necessary, prosecutions should be brought. It is then a matter for due process of law before a trial judge and jury as to whether people are found guilty and punished.

On the hon. Gentleman's first point, if he implies any strictures at all, he should be aware of the amount of help that has been given to the police force since 1979. He should recall that in the last two years of the last Labour Government, up to 5,000 police men and women were leaving the police force each year and voting with their feet.

Sir John Farr: Is it not time to cease the spiteful vendetta against a group of pathetic old people who really have nothing left to offer?

Mr. Patten: Again, I respect my hon. Friend's strongly held personal views, but Parliament has expressed its views and I cannot add anything to the answer that I gave to the two previous questions.

Drugs

13. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information on drug shipments and drug seizures from illegal traffic from European countries and from other countries is shared with United Kingdom, European countries and other interested organisations.

Mr. John Patten: Responsibility for combating drug trafficking is shared between Her Majesty's Custom and Excise and the police service. There are close and developing links with other European countries and elsewhere. In some of those countries, those links are enhanced by the posting or exchange of drugs liaison officers. Effective exchange of information is essential, and we devote considerable efforts to that. The United Kingdom also plays a full role in the work of international organisations—in particular, Interpol and the Customs Co-operation Council.

Mr. McFall: I am sure that the Minister will congratulate Customs and Excise on the record seizures of drugs that it has undertaken. Nevertheless, heroin is still coming into this country at an increasing rate, and something must be done to control it. In view of the recent "Dispatches" television programme, has the Minister conducted an inquiry into how the police, Customs and Excise and the security services work together and how they share information with other countries so as to reduce the hard drugs problem that each and every hon. Member sees weekly in his or her constituency?

Mr. Patten: I agree that it is a serious problem—and not, I hope, one for party political debate. I assure the hon. Gentleman that co-operation between the services—customs and the police at frontiers and at ports of entry—is very close indeed. Her Majesty's Government are doing all that they possibly can to cut off overland supplies of heroin, in particular, coming along the so-called Balkan route. In the next few months, with British taxpayers' money, we shall be setting up a national drugs intelligence unit in Czechoslovakia to try to intercept drugs coming overland. We hope shortly to do the same in Hungary.

Mr. Soames: Would it not be a good idea if the airlines, when checking in passengers in those countries from which large quantities of drugs come to this country, were to hand each passenger a paper in his or her own language clearly explaining that if they bring drugs into the United Kingdom they are likely to be caught and, if they are caught, they are likely to go away for a very long time indeed?

Mr. Patten: That is an interesting thought from my hon. Friend and I shall pursue it. The effect on anyone flying into Kuala Lumpur and hearing a Malaysian Airlines hostess saying, "You are about to land in Kuala Lumpur: if you bring drugs into our country, the penalty

is death by hanging" must be very salutary indeed. We do not have that penalty, but we have life imprisonment—which means between 20 to 30 years in the case of some of those convicted in the most serious cases. The notice to which my hon. Friend referred is a very good idea indeed.

Mr. Sheerman: The Minister of State—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where is the shadow Home Secretary?"] My right hon. Friend is presenting awards at an important lunch. The Minister of State does not want to make this a political issue, but I want to make two important political points. It is all very well for the Government to pretend to mount a campaign against drugs and drug imports, but at the same time they have allowed another Department, the Treasury—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members do not want to hear—to cut 400 customs officer jobs. Customs officers are the front-line troops. They are the people who stop drugs flowing into Britain. The Government have also allowed the Port of London police to be privatised. What does that do for the campaign against drug imports?

Mr. Patten: What a rant—the hon. Gentleman gives his well-known imitation of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), but without the charm and lightness of touch. The Government are spending about half a billion pounds per year dealing with the serious international problems caused by drug traffickers trying to bring drugs into Britain. I would hope for a little bipartisan support for the sort of work done, for example, by our drugs liaison officers abroad, who have brought about such successful seizures of heroin and other drugs in recent months.

Car Crime

4. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on new initiatives undertaken by car manufacturers as part of his strategy to defeat car crime.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I am glad to report that in the past few months we have made real progress with the car manufacturers. I have had three meetings with them and our manufacturers are committed to improving the security of their cars and, in particular, introducing immobilising devices, deadlocks and visible identification numbers. Much has been done in the past few months, but more needs to be done. I am meeting the manufacturers again early in March.

Mr. Hague: I welcome the moves made so far by my right hon. Friend to encourage manufacturers to make cars more defensible. Will he undertake to include the insurance industry in his fight against car crime and encourage it to give financial incentives by way of lower premiums to owners who improve the security of their vehicles?

Mr. Baker: I have had two meetings with the Association of British Insurers. At the first, there was not much co-operation, but I am glad to say that in October the association announced a scheme similar to that which my hon. Friend suggested—to offer discounts to certain car owners who have security devices fitted when the car is being made in the factory. It has also introduced excess payments for when goods are stolen from people's cars. That is a beginning, but I expect the insurance industry to do much more in helping to reduce car crime.

Mr. William Ross: Is the Secretary of State aware that any measures taken to increase car security will be welcome in Northern Ireland, where stolen vehicles are so often used in terrorist murders and other such crimes? Will he also ask the manufacturers to consider the possibility of installing devices to enable stolen cars to be traced, so that if a terrorist murder is committed the police can get on the track quickly?

Mr. Baker: I acknowledge that in Northern Ireland cars are used extensively for terrorist activities, quite apart from normal criminal activities to support terrorism. On the hon. Gentleman's last point, I am glad to say that work is being done on such devices so that we can trace cars more effectively. All those measures must be taken because cars are now involved in 30 per cent. of all crime. Unfortunately, that is a record unique to Britain. We have a uniquely high level of car crime and we must all do something to reduce it.

Mr. Onslow: Can my right hon. Friend say what proportion of that car crime is carried out by juveniles and how many of them come into the category of persistent offenders?

Mr. Baker: A large proportion of car crime is carried out by young males between the ages of 12 and 22. I must ask my right hon. Friend to wait for an answer to his question about persistent offenders. I shall be making a statement in the next few days about offending while on bail.

Mr. Darling: It must be six years since the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) first met the manufacturers. Since then, there have been about half a dozen glitzy launches—featuring among others, the Home Secretary grinning into the television cameras, telling us that something was going to be done some time. Is it not time that the Government forced the pace and, if necessary, made regulations requiring manufacturers to incorporate safety procedures? We do that regularly for aviation safety matters. Why cannot the Government force the pace, make real progress and do something about reducing what the Home Secretary acknowledges is the fastest growing crime?

Mr. Baker: Progress is being made. Significant changes have been made during the past few months. As a result of my promptings, car manufacturers are committed to introducing immobilising devices on all new cars by the end of the year. In addition, I have put the matter on the agenda for the Ministers of the Interior of our partners in Europe, because I want a European standard with tighter security applying to all cars made in Europe and sold in this country.

National Drugs Intelligence Unit

5. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current annual budget of the national drugs intelligence unit.

Mr. John Patten: The annual budget for 1991-92 is £5·2 million.

Mr. Steen: Does the Minister agree that something must be done to control imports of the drug known as Ecstasy, which is not merely creeping into schools in London but has reached teenagers in my constituency in

south Devon? Is he aware that that drug is not grown on some poppy field in South America but that 98 per cent. of it is manufactured in Holland, which is one of our EC partners? The Dutch have been very lax in dealing with that. What does my right hon. Friend think that we could do to stop the drug being imported into this country, or arranging some reciprocal arrangement whereby we would stop importing Dutch cheese or some such thing?

Mr. Patten: I do not know about that kind of radical suggestion, but the police were very successful last year in closing down four domestic manufacturers of Ecstasy—hence the fact that most of the drug being sold on our streets comes from abroad, some from continental Europe. That is why it is so important that, as one of the conclusions of the Maastricht settlement, it was agreed that the 12 countries should set up an organisation loosely known as Europol whose first job would be to set up a Europeanwide drugs intelligence unit among the Twelve, which should lead to a greater level of co-operation with our continental partners to stop Ecstasy and other drugs coming into the country.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: How do we know that the drugs enforcement authorities are doing their job when there is no point at which they are democratically accountable to elected people? Is that not a pertinent question in the context of the millions of pounds worth of drugs on the streets throughout the United Kingdom? Where is the process of accountability whereby elected people can ask questions such as, "What are you doing to stop it?"

Mr. Patten: There are thousands of police officers in the 17 drugs wings who are accountable to the police authorities, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I come to this place to answer questions about them. Also we have democratic accountability for the customs service, which is deeply involved. Occasionally it is important to ensure that people are protected, such as the brave police officers, both men and women—I am sorry that the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) has not time to listen—who serve abroad as drugs liaison officers on difficult and dangerous work. We should support them and not seek to undermine them.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Is my right hon. Friend aware that I have lost a young constituent to one Ecstasy tablet? It is a killer drug. Is my right hon. Friend aware that the charity Release is putting out the leaflet that I have here, which dupes young people into the belief that Ecstasy is somehow not a harmful drug? Will my right hon. Friend undertake to withdraw all Government funding for that organisation until it sends a clear message to young people about drugs—"No, no, and no"?

Mr. Patten: I shall read carefully the evidence that my hon. Friend will probably wish to send me about the document to which he referred. I agree entirely that Ecstasy is a drug which can kill. The first reported death was in 1989 and there were five deaths last year. Ecstasy kills because it affects the respiratory system and causes lung failure and hence death. Also clear evidence is emerging that, unfortunately, long-term psychotic effects may be involved. That is why we are absolutely determined to make sure that the advice that reaches young people is correct. My hon. Friend is right to put his finger on advice that he thinks is wrong. That is why I give a clear undertaking that our answer to pleas to legalise the use of soft drugs will be no, no, and no again.

Miss Lestor: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will not accuse me of ranting and raving as I am always the sweet face of reason.

I agree with the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) about the dangers of Ecstasy. There is not a parent of teenage children who is not worried out of their life about the use of cocaine, Ecstasy and heroin, especially when our children can obtain them almost without question anywhere in the country, even in the constituency of South Hams. The Minister has few suggestions on how to combat that problem and the Government have cut the number of customs officers by 400. I believe that all parents would rather pay increased taxes or not receive tax cuts if that would deal with the problem. Why has the number of customs officers been cut when only recently an amount of Ecstasy was seized at Sheerness and cocaine is periodically seized in various parts of the country? Such a cut is a false economy and it is killing our children.

Mr. Patten: I enjoyed the hon. Lady's charmed offensive and I would never in any circumstances dream of comparing her with her hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East.

I have two things to say in response. First, customs have been extremely successful this year with record seizures of Ecstasy. Secondly, the hon. Lady does not seem to be aware that 17 drug prevention teams have been established in areas where Ecstasy and other drugs are being consumed in large amounts and sold on the streets. I visited the drug prevention team in Newham only last week. I have also seen the excellent work being done on prevention in schools and with young people to get across the message, which must be repeated year after year as children come into the consuming group, about the dangers of drug abuse. The work of the drug prevention teams deserves the support of the whole House.

Police Clerical Posts

7. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the civilianisation of police clerical posts.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): In the past eight years, some 5,400 police officers have been freed for operational policing duties by civilianising posts which do not require the powers or skills of a police officer, representing an efficiency gain of around £100 million per year.

Mr. King: I thank my hon. Friend for that excellent reply. Will he extend his congratulations to the West Midlands police, who have civilianised 413 posts since 1985? Does not that suggest how we can release police officers to duties within the community at very little cost to the police authority?

Mr. Lloyd: I certainly extend my congratulations to the West Midlands police. It has done well and civilianised 73 per cent. of the posts identified, but, even though it has done very well, it has somewhat further to go.

Mr. Alton: In the light of the 86 per cent. increase in robberies on Merseyside in the past 13 years, does the Minister agree that the freeing of police officers through the civilianisation of posts should give Merseyside police the chance to put more policemen back on to the beat? Does he further agree that there is a need to reopen neighbourhood police stations and to put more emphasis on community policing?

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman is right about the benefits from civilianisation. That suggests to me that he supports the policy of sector policing that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has put his weight behind. That policy means that the police identify with the local community that they serve.

Sir Peter Emery: In parallel with civilianisation of the police, will my hon. Friend ensure that instructions are given to all chief constables to increase further the designation of special constables and to increase the special constabulary, which would lead to more bobbies on the beat? Is that not the best discouragement to crime and an encouragement to those elderly people who fear being attacked on the streets?

Mr. Lloyd: Our objective is that the number of special constables should equal about 20 per cent. of the regular police force. The campaigns that we have been conducting are moving in that direction because special constables have a particularly valuable part to play.

Mr. Randall: On the question of police numbers, why has the Minister constantly refused to provide chief constables with the number of police officers that they need to reduce crime? Why do not the Government copy Labour's policy of supporting our police forces by substantially increasing the number of bobbies on the beat in a self-financing fashion?

Mr. Lloyd: It is extraordinary that the hon. Gentleman comes to the Dispatch Box to suggest that the Government follow Labour's policy. When the Labour Government left office, they left the police force about 7,000 under strength.

Travellers

8. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to increase the penalties for the unlawful occupation of private or public land by traveller families; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The main criminal penalties for unlawful occupation of land, under the Caravan Sites Act 1968 and the Public Order Act 1986, are fines. The maximum level of all fines will increase when the Criminal Justice Act 1991 takes effect in October.

Mr. Dunn: Does the Minister realise that traveller families pose an immense law and order problem to local authorities and the police, especially in north-west Kent? Will he therefore liaise with his colleagues in the Department of the Environment so that a joint effort can be made to give the law the rigour to prohibit the illegal occupation of public and private land by traveller families?

Mr. Lloyd: I well understand, as my county has similar problems involving unlawful occupation of sites by gipsies and other travelling folk. As my hon. Friend implies, the principal Act belongs to the Department of the Environment—the Caravan Sites Act 1968. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment recognises that there can be difficulties with that Act and is considering whether a review would be helpful. However, local authorities have had a duty, since 1968, to provide adequate sites for gipsies normally resorting to their area and, where they have done so to the satisfaction of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, they have criminal powers to remove illegal campers.

Mr. Trimble: Would it be possible to have another look at the last provision that the Minister mentioned, which imposes on local authorities a duty to provide sites for travellers? Why should they have to facilitate what is, in all its aspects, an anti-social form of life and thus impose a loss on rate and charge payers, who then have to put up with such sites in their neighbourhood?

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate the difficulty of moving on people who lead a nomadic lifestyle when there is nowhere to move them to. As I said, it is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. He is concerned about the issue and I shall draw the remarks that have been made today to his attention.

Sir George Gardiner: Is my hon. Friend aware that section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 has proved something of a disappointment in protecting those whose homes are near tracts of land that are habitually invaded by travellers? Does he agree that those peaceful citizens have their rights too, particularly against the disturbance, disorder and disruption that is often brought by those people? Is not further legislation urgently needed?

Mr. Lloyd: Section 39 is available for the police to use at their discretion. It was designed to deal with seriously aggravated unlawful occupation, not to undermine the Caravan Sites Act 1968, which is the basic legislation in that area. We have no plans to change section 39. It was recently reviewed and guidance was issued, but we shall examine how that guidance has been used.

Mr. Madden: While I recognise that the occupation of unofficial sites can cause a severe nuisance to settled communities, surely the Minister must appreciate that the only proper way of dealing with the matter is to enforce the 1968 legislation. How can he justify the fact that, so long after that legislation was introduced, local authorities such as Kirklees and Calderdale have made absolutely no permanent provision with proper facilities to provide proper homes for travelling people?

Mr. Lloyd: I have some sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman says. In not getting themselves designated, county councils cause problems for their local residents, as they are unable to achieve the powers that would enable them to deal with unlawful campers.

West Yorkshire Police Authority

9. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make a decision relating to West Yorkshire police authority's application for a £3·6 million grant from the urban crime fund.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We expect to receive details of applications from all those eligible, including West Yorkshire, later this month, and to make decisions by the end of March.

Mr. Riddick: Is my hon. Friend aware that the residents of West Yorkshire will be pleased to know that a decision on the matter is not too far off? I am sure that every one of them would want that extra money to come to West Yorkshire, as I do. Is not the extra £3·6 million further evidence of the Government's clear commitment to fighting crime? Does not that contrast sharply with the complete mess that the Government inherited from the Labour party in 1979, when there was low police morale, low police pay and the police were way under strength?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend is right. We expect the authorities to come up with imaginative schemes, designed to tackle specific local crime problems, such as kerb crawling, mugging and burglary. If they do, they will certainly bring great benefits to the public in their district.

Mr. Lofthouse: I am sure that West Yorkshire will welcome any assistance that the schemes can give, and will also appreciate that its rate support grant has increased by 16 per cent., but that does not mean that it can bring its force up to the required standard. Has the Minister any plans to assist the West Yorkshire police authority to enable it to bring its police forces up to the required standard?

Mr. Lloyd: Although spending nationally on the police has risen 73 per cent. during this Government's life, in West Yorkshire the figure is 83 per cent. Therefore, the spending in that police authority area is higher than elsewhere, so it does have the resources to police to strength and it will receive additional resources under the arrangements.

Sir Donald Thompson: Is my hon. Friend aware of the fact that we welcome the £3·6 million in West Yorkshire? Will he ensure that the money is spent throughout the county?

Mr. Lloyd: It will be spent throughout the police area, except in those regions that do not come within the urban crime catchment area——

Sir Donald Thompson: That is the wrong answer.

Mr. Lloyd: I am giving my hon. Friend the correct answer; if he has asked the wrong question, that is his problem.

The area does not include Wakefield and Calderdale, but if the police authority has good sense, it will arrange its spending so that the benefit will also be felt outside the immediate area to which the money applies.

Mr. Sheerman: Conservative Central Office does not seem to have got its questions and answers right today. At a time when crime has doubled in this country and is increasing at a rate of 28 per cent. per annum in West Yorkshire, how can a Minister stand in the House and say that it will keep West Yorkshire 154 police officers under strength this year and next year?

Mr. Lloyd: If the hon. Gentleman had listened the last time we had Home Office questions he would know perfectly well that the standard spending assessment has been set in West Yorkshire to enable it to employ police officers up to the full establishment. The problem in West Yorkshire is that it costs more there to put a police man on the beat, and the authority spends more per head of the population. If its cost effectiveness was equal to that of the average police authority, it would be able to recruit up to full establishment.

Derek Bentley

12. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the case of Derek Bentley.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The report which I have received from the police is receiving careful consideration. I shall decide as soon as I can whether any action on my part is appropriate in this case.

Mr. Burns: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he recall that it is now 40 years since that unfortunate and backward youth was hanged? Does he accept that not only that youth's family but many other people have a total lack of comprehension as to how someone could be hanged in this country when he was in police custody when the gun was fired and the unfortunate police officer was killed by another person? Although it is 40 years since the incident, I urge my right hon. Friend to give urgent consideration to the case because the suffering of Derek Bentley's family continues day in and day out.

Mr. Baker: I appreciate the importance of the case and the public interest in it. The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has taken new evidence which has been received and is being assessed by my Department. It will then be submitted to me and I shall review not only that evidence but all the earlier evidence, the reports of the trial and all the voluminous other aspects of the case. I assure my hon. Friend that I shall do that as soon as I can.

Mr. Corbett: I congratulate the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on raising this issue. Has the Home Secretary considered exercising his powers of a posthumous pardon in this case? If he has, will he explain why he decided not to act? Secondly, I urge him to make the best possible speed in this matter because for many of us it represents the most dreadful stain on our criminal justice system.

Mr. Baker: The material new facts that have emerged involve new evidence from certain officers who were present on the night of the crime and who witnessed certain things. That evidence has to be assessed, and when that is done I shall, of course, make a decision.

Sunday Trading

13. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of discussions on the future of Sunday trading.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): My extensive programme of separate discussions with a wide range of major interest groups on possible ways of reforming the Shops Act 1950 is nearing completion. For the present, there remain great differences between the groups. Once the legal position of the Shops

Act 1950 in relation to Community law is clear, I hope to be in a position to recommend a way forward to the House.

Mr. Coombs: Is it not by now abundantly obvious to everyone that those organisations that remain implacably opposed to Sunday trading will never agree to any compromise solution to the problem that could be laid before the House and command widespread support? Has not the time come for the Government to commit themselves unequivocally to legislate in the next Parliament so that those who wish to shop on Sunday and exercise their free choice to do so are enabled to do so by total deregulation of the law?

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend represents the important views of a number of colleagues. However, another group of people have equally strongly held views, and for that reason it is not as easy as my hon. Friend would have the House believe to introduce legislation that would command total respect in the House.

Mr. Ray Powell: Does the Minister appreciate that tomorrow there will be an opportunity to ensure that proposals put to the House could be accepted, could go into Committee and could form the basis of discussion for any Government returned on 9 April? I know that a Labour Government will be returned and I am sure that that Government will not take as long as from 1986 to the present time, as this Government have, to do something constructive about changing the law and bringing in legislation that could be enforced throughout the country.

Mrs. Rumbold: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's views; I also appreciate the fact that he is presenting a proposal to the House of Commons. I think that he knows that it is difficult for the Government to accept any proposal before the question of Community law is resolved, and also that his proposals are relatively controversial.

Mr. Malins: Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning the supermarkets that have recently been opening on Sundays? Does she accept that very few people are totally opposed to Sunday trading, but millions want some form of compromise that recognises the special nature of Sunday?

Mrs. Rumbold: Many people wish to recognise the special nature of Sunday. Interestingly, however, each time that the topic is raised in the House of Commons, very diverse views are expressed. That, I think, clears the stand that the Government have been taking, and their view that the matter cannot be easily resolved. I share some of my hon. Friend's views, but I do not believe that the House is yet ready to accept a proposal from the Government that will command wide support from a large number of hon. Members.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Salmond: When the Prime Minister visits Scotland this weekend, will he be big enough to acknowledge that, sooner rather than later, he will have to bow to the wish of the Scottish people for self-determination? Does he not understand that, at a time when even he is forecasting a Europe of up to 30 member states by the end of the century, it is inevitable that the Scottish nation will demand to be a full part of that process of change?

The Prime Minister: No, Sir. I disagree fundamentally with the hon. Gentleman. The Union between England and Scotland is greater than the sum of its parts, and always has been. I understand what activates the hon. Gentleman, but I believe that he is profoundly misleading Scotland and treading a path that is damaging Scotland and the Union.

Mr. Fishburn: At a time of economic difficulty and rising unemployment across the world, does not this nation—as a great trading nation—need, more than anything else, constant tax policy, the lowest possible income tax and competitive rates of corporation tax? Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be a disaster to adopt a policy that changed almost from hour to hour under Labour, with no constancy or purpose of any sort?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of clear-cut and low corporate and personal tax rates. I note that the Opposition's tax plans have gone back to the drawing board; after five years of careful preparation, they have been ditched in a period of five weeks. I also note that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith)—who said, when he took on the job that there would be
"no more phoney shadow Cabinet Budgets"—
has now promised that there will be a phoney shadow Cabinet Budget.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister confirm that today's official figures show that the British economy is in its longest recession for over 60 years? As the right hon. Gentleman was Chancellor before it started and has been Prime Minister throughout its course, is it not clear that he is not only the Prime Minister of recession, but the prime cause of recession?

The Prime Minister: Before the right hon. Gentleman goes into overdrive, perhaps he will confirm that, in the past three months, industrial production has fallen faster in Germany, faster in France, faster in the United States and faster in Japan than it has in this country; and that, if we take the last year as a whole, industrial production fell more in Japan, and more in Germany, than in the United Kingdom. Why does the right hon. Gentleman think that is, if he blames me for everything?

Mr. Kinnock: To put it into perspective, let me point out that since 1988 the German economy has grown by 10 per cent. The British economy, under the Conservative Government, has not grown at all. Will the Prime Minister recognise that and stop groping round to try to find excuses for his own failure? Does he recall that it is exactly a year since he told us in this House, "Our policies are working"? Does he recall that in that 12 months the British economy has contracted by 2·5 per cent. and that

unemployment has gone up by 750,000? Do not today's figures make it clear that it is official—Majorism isn't working?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman is now keen to look at a longer period than just the last year, he will also be interested to know that between 1981 and 1991 the British economy grew faster than the German economy, the French economy, the Italian economy or the economy of any other country in Europe. Will he now confirm, since he seems to regard all problems as being entirely domestic, that over the second half of the last year industrial production fell in the United States, in Japan and elsewhere and that Germany's gross domestic product has now declined for three quarters in succession and Germany is in recession? How can this be if, as the right hon. Gentleman claims, it is all a British problem?

Mr. Kinnock: In the last 18 months of recession—*[Interruption.]* British people are not on the dole in Germany; they are on the dole in Britain.

In the last 18 months of recession, unemployment in Britain has gone up by 1 million and the British economy has contracted by nearly 4 per cent. The figures speak for themselves. During the course of the time the right hon. Gentleman has been Chancellor and Prime Minister he is convicted by his own record and condemned by his own inaction in the face of the slump that he caused.

The Prime Minister: The House will have noted that the right hon. Gentleman cannot understand the facts and cannot handle the questions. He may recall that in Germany more than 3 million people are unemployed and he may bear it in mind that a higher proportion of people are in work in this country than in Germany or in any other European country except Denmark. Let me try again to help the hon. Gentleman. The fact is that the world is in an economic slow-down, as even the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) has now acknowledged. That makes domestic politics even more important. That is why we have cut interest rates seven times in a year and halved inflation in a year, have the lowest number of strikes for half a century and have cut the basic rate of tax. As a result of our action, real earnings are rising and we have lower interest rates, lower mortgage rates, lower inflation and the right circumstances for recovery. The people of this country will not let the right hon. Gentleman throw that away.

Mr. Stanbrook: When my right hon. Friend sees the new Irish Prime Minister soon will he tell him that the biggest contribution the Irish Republic can make to peace, stability and reconciliation in Northern Ireland is to renounce its claim to sovereignty over Northern Ireland, as that claim encourages Irish Republican terrorism and gives it legitimacy, as well as being the strongest stumbling block in the way of all-party talks aimed at constitutional progress?

The Prime Minister: I have already spoken to the new Taoiseach and we have agreed to meet shortly. I think that we must wait and see what his detailed policies will be, but everything that I have seen and heard suggests that he is certainly very understanding of the situation in Northern Ireland. Amendment of the Irish constitution is, of course, a matter for the Republic, but I am glad that it continues to be an issue that could be tackled in fresh political talks. The Government remain committed to the Anglo-Irish Agreement unless and until agreement can be reached on new and more broadly satisfactory arrangements.

Q2. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Kirkwood: Has the Prime Minister had time today to study the Department of Trade and Industry's figures that were released on Tuesday, which showed that over the last five years Chinese quotas for the importation of cashmere garments into the European Community have been exceeded by 500,000 units and that in 1991 the actual importation exceeded the quotas by over 400 per cent? Is the Prime Minister aware that 500,000 cashmere jerseys are worth £75 million to textile communities such as my own in the central borders in Scotland? Will he take a personal interest in stopping this scandalous dumping and make sure that the overshoot is clawed back during the next two years, the time remaining to the EC-Chinese trade agreement?

The Prime Minister: I am aware of the matter that the hon. Gentleman raises, not least because he was courteous enough to give me an indication of what he was going to mention this afternoon. I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. I have asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to look into the matter and to contact the hon. Gentleman.

Sir Robert McCrindle: To revert to the Scottish question that was raised by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), has the Prime Minister noted the statement today by the leaders of the financial services industries north of the border that in the event of a measure of devolution or independence, to which the Opposition parties aspire, the likeliest result would be that many of the financial services companies would move south of the border? In his forthcoming visit to Scotland, will the Prime Minister underline the fact that these are matters which the Scottish people should also take into account before moving in the direction Opposition Members would like them to go—in favour of devolution or independence?

The Prime Minister: I did notice those remarks, which were widely reported this morning. We have made it clear for a long period that we believe that devolution or independence would damage very severely the degree of inward investment into Scotland and the degree of self-generating investment within Scotland as well. The Union has been in the interests of both this country and Scotland for many years, and it remains so.

Q3. **Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fatchett: May I also raise a matter with the Prime Minister, of which I have given him prior notice? It concerns the tragic death on 5 February of six-year-old Carley Reavill who died in hospital of meningitis. That is the reason why I gave the Prime Minister prior notice of the question. She died not because, as the Department of Health says, she was too ill to be moved, but because,

according to her paediatrician, Dr. Alison Schurtz, no intensive care hospital bed was available at St. Mary's hospital or Great Ormond Street hospital. Is not that a tragic waste of a life? Does it not provide further evidence for the argument that if money is available it should be spent not on tax cuts but on our health service?

The Prime Minister: I asked for a report on this tragic case this morning. As the hon. Gentleman has raised it, I reply assuming that he has received the permission of the family for it to be the subject of a public exchange. I am advised that doctors at the Queen Elizabeth II hospital have confirmed that Carley could not have been transferred when the hospital test results showed that she had meningitis and the test results were available within one hour of Carley's admission. Carley's decline, I am informed, was sudden and fast. Medical advice is that paediatric intensive care is unlikely to have arrested this.

The House may wish to know that between 1979 and 1990 the perinatal mortality rate for England and Wales dropped by 45 per cent. It is now at its lowest ever recorded level. As for national health service resources, the hon. Gentleman will know of the very large real-terms increases that have been made—in excess, in fact, of the real-terms increases promised by the Opposition at the last general election.

Q4. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Brazier: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many of those who live on their income from savings are either widows or those who retired early, very often to look after an elderly dependant? Does he further agree that it would be a grave injustice indeed to put swingeing extra taxes on the savings of these people as a result of the profligacy of socialism?

The Prime Minister: I believe that such people would find it inexplicable if that were to happen. We have sought to encourage savings by abolishing the investment income surcharge and by introducing tax-exempt special savings accounts. It is the Labour party which wants to increase tax by extending national insurance. Its plans would hit more than 1 million people, three quarters of whom pay tax at the basic rate. So much for the Opposition's promise that no one earning under £20,000 a year would be hit. That promise is worthless and that pledge by the Opposition illustrates why the promise is worthless.

Q5. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Livingstone: Tomorrow is the first anniversary of the stabbing to death of the young black schoolboy Rolan Adams and in the year since then 15 black families—council tenants and owner-occupiers—have been driven out of their homes on the Thamesmead estate. The campaign, including a fire-bombing, has been orchestrated by the local headquarters of the British National party. Is there anything that the Government can do to change those events? Will the Prime Minister support the unanimous decision by Greenwich Conservative councillors to support the demonstration called by the Anti-Racist Alliance for Saturday at noon in Plumstead High street to demand the closure of the British National party headquarters?

The Prime Minister: I have every sympathy for Rolan Adams's family at this sad time and I wholeheartedly condemn racial attacks and those who commit or incite racial hatred. The hon. Gentleman raised this matter with me in December and my office subsequently corresponded with the mayor of Bexley. Although the location of the British National party office is a matter for Bexley council, we have drawn the council's attention to the laws available to deal with racial hatred.

The local police searched the BNP premises in January and evidence has been submitted to the Crown prosecution service which is considering a prosecution. Rolan Adams's murder a year ago led to the speedy identification and prosecution of the attackers and the murderer subsequently received a life sentence. I very much hope that in the future that will deter similar attacks which are a blot on our country.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business of the House for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 24 FEBRUARY—Motion on the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order

Proceedings on the Parliamentary Corporate Bodies Bill

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

TUESDAY 25 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Local Government Bill *[Lords]*

Motion on the Pneumoconiosis Etc. (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations

WEDNESDAY 26 FEBRUARY—Debate on inflation on a Government motion

Motion on the Fire Service College Trading Fund Order.

THURSDAY 27 FEBRUARY—Debate on Welsh affairs on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 28 FEBRUARY—Private Members' motions

MONDAY 2 MARCH—Until seven o'clock motion to take note of EC documents relating to asylum and immigration; details will be given in the *Official Report.*

Debate on the report from the Select Committee on Sittings of the House on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

[Monday 2 March
Floor of the House
Relevant European Community Documents
(a) 8810/91 Right of Asylum
(b) 8811/91 Immigration
Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
(a) HC 24-x (1991-92)
(b) HC 24-x (1991-92)]

Dr. Cunningham: Has the Leader of the House had time to consider the High Court's decision that computer evidence on the non-payment of poll tax is inadmissible in magistrates courts? Is he aware that, as a consequence, local authorities will be denied revenue of about £3 million each week until the Government's belated action to correct this appalling blunder in their legislation comes into effect? Will the Government compensate local authorities and local poll tax payers for their inefficiency in the poll tax legislation, which means that the biggest single cause of non-payment and non-collection of the poll tax is the action of Her Majesty's Government and their appalling and inadequate legislation? May we have a statement on this important issue next week from the Secretary of State for the Environment?

Why does the Leader of the House persist in giving the Government Supply days, as he is planning to do again next week, when he cannot find time for the proper consideration of legislation and introduces guillotines almost weekly? He cannot find time to give the Opposition Supply days, but he can find time—*[Interruption.]* We are talking about next week's business—but he can find time to allocate to the Government. We are very happy to debate the Government's abysmal economic performance, of course, but should not he think harder about finding time for more Opposition Supply days before the end of this Parliament?

Will the Leader of the House give us an assurance—if not today, certainly in his business statement next week—that, following the Budget on 10 March, we shall have the normal allocation of time to debate the Budget proposals? If there is to be a general election on 9 April, the proclamation will have to be announced on Monday 16 March, so how will the Government allocate proper time for debate on the Budget in that short period? Will he assure us that the Budget debate will not be truncated and that we shall have the normal period to debate the Government's proposals?

Mr. MacGregor: As to the hon. Gentleman's first point, he will know that it was not the Government who caused, in the case of some local authorities, considerable funds not to be paid as a result of non-payment of the community charge; it was the action of those who did not pay their community charge, as most responsible citizens did. It was certainly aided and abetted by the members of the Opposition and the many Labour councillors who actively encouraged them not to pay, so the hon. Gentleman cannot be allowed to get away with that. We must be clear where the fault lies.

On the question of computer evidence in magistrates court cases, the hon. Gentleman will know that the Government are taking action as quickly as possible by means of an amendment to the Local Government Finance Bill in another place. I hope that we shall have his support for that amendment when the Bill returns to this House. As so many of his hon. Friends have encouraged non-payment, he can now assist us by actively supporting that amendment.

On the hon. Gentleman's second question about a debate next week on inflation, he knows that I have been pressed on many occasions to find Government time to debate the economy. I am happy to agree to that as Second Reading debates are progressing. Incidentally, I have been very fair to the Opposition with regard to Supply days. After yesterday's Supply day, there is a heavy demand from my colleagues for more such days. The Opposition were routed yesterday and their Front-Bench spokesmen were wiped off the floor.

On the question of a normal allocation of time for the Budget debate, the hon. Gentleman will know that it is not a matter for next week's business.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I make the plea which I made last week, the week before and the week before that: will hon. Members confine business questions today to the business for next week? There will be opportunities during next week's debates to make party political points.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Caravan Sites Act 1968 and section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 are now quite inadequate to deal with the growing problem of travellers in many constituencies, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) mentioned earlier? May we have an

urgent debate on this subject next week to discuss ways in which these two pieces of legislation may be strengthened and whether we should introduce a new criminal offence of aggravated trespass?

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware of the concern felt in many constituencies about travellers. I understand that there was a question about it earlier this afternoon. I shall certainly discuss it further with my right hon. Friend, but I will not be able to find time for a debate in Government time next week.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Given the wild enthusiasm for Opposition Supply days that the Leader of the House tell us now exists among Conservative Members, may I ask the right hon. Gentleman whether he recalls that, by this time last year, and in 1990, there had been a Liberal Democrat Supply day? I know that approaches have been made through the usual channels. Will the right hon. Gentleman assure me that he will follow precedent and arrange for a Supply day the week after next?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot give that precise assurance, but I can say that minority parties are normally allowed about one sixth of the Supply days, and that we have had five Labour party Supply days. I am working pretty well to the normal timetable. I am aware that there has been discussion about the matter, and I shall certainly keep it in mind.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): My right hon. Friend will know of my concern about standards of reporting in broadcasting in this country, and I know that he shares that concern. I wonder whether he read the centre pages of the *Evening Standard* last night, which were about an extraordinary incident that seems to have taken place on the BBC television "Nine O'clock News". Someone who was interviewed was portrayed——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is just the point that I was seeking to make. Is this question about a debate next week?

Mr. Tracey: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: It does not sound like it.

Mr. Tracey: Somebody who was interviewed on the news was portrayed as being deprived but was subsequently revealed to be far from that, and was possibly a "plant". May we have an urgent debate on bias in broadcasting in the BBC news?

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware of tne newspaper report, and, although I did not see the news programme, it seemed to me that it not only gave a distorted impression of the whole student situation but failed to make the point that we have one of the most generous student support systems of all equivalent countries. Furthermore, a single example was given—a sample of one—and it turned out to be highly distorted. I agree with my hon. Friend that the programme was an example of highly biased reporting which should not have happened. I cannot promise a debate on the subject next week, but I hope that the authorities in the BBC will consider the case carefully. I am aware of the concern among my hon. Friends.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Leaving aside the continued Tory vendetta against the BBC, when business is due to be announced and the Secretary of State for the Environment is due to speak, will the Leader of the House make it clear that the right hon. Gentleman's speech will be a renewal of his leadership campaign to decide who will be Leader of the Opposition after 9 April?

Mr. MacGregor: If the hon. Gentleman is referring to yesterday's debate, I notice that there is a renewed campaign about who should be shadow Chancellor.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Now that we have been given the opportunity to see that the national health service reform proposals are working extremely well, and that the only suggestion from the Opposition is that the whole lot should be reversed and the monolithic NHS, which worked so patchily in the past, should be restored, may we have a debate in which the poverty of the Opposition proposals could be exposed and the very good story that we have to tell about the NHS reforms could be fully told?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend that a debate would be desirable. Labour's so-called health policy amounts to a wrecker's charter, wrecking so many of the benefits that the NHS reforms are already bringing, and makes it clear that they would bring back trade union domination, putting union demands before patients' needs. I agree with my hon. Friend that we may wish to debate the issue, but I do not think that I could accommodate a debate next week.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Home Secretary to come back to the Chamber this afternoon and make a statement on this morning's High Court ruling in favour of my constituents David and Eleanor Bullard, and against the Government's persistent illegal use of uncorroborated computer printouts in poll tax cases in magistrates courts? The ruling puts a question mark over 11 million liability orders in England and Wales—*[Interruption.]* Tory Members may shout, as if we were talking about a minority of people, but this matter affects more than one in four of all adults in this country.

Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Home Secretary to conduct from today an urgent review of each of the 170 people, including 13 pensioners, 35 people who are unemployed and four whose only income was invalidity benefit, who have been put in prison on the basis of uncorroborated computer evidence, so that their cases may be considered and compensation can be paid?

Mr. MacGregor: I hope that the hon. Gentleman realises that the vast majority of people are incensed by the fact that some people have not paid their community charge when they are perfectly able to do so. Within the community charge system, there are benefits and rebates for those on lower incomes and for those most in need. The fault lies with those who do not comply with the law as everyone else does. On the point about magistrates courts, I have already made plain what the Government are doing.

Mr. Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): My right hon. Friend will be aware that it is many, many months since the tragic events at Hillsborough. He will equally be aware that, for many of the relatives of those who lost their lives—11 of my constituents died at Hillsborough—the anguish goes on, because they are still not satisfied that the truth has come out of the inquiry. For them, that is the only way in

[Mr. Malcolm Thornton]

which they can put their loved ones finally to rest. Will my right hon. Friend ask the Attorney-General to address the issue as a matter of urgency? Every day it goes on brings renewed anguish to those tragic families.

Mr. MacGregor: I understand, of course, the concern that my hon. Friend expresses on behalf of the families. We all recall that tragic day. Without commenting on the details, because I do not know them, I will raise the case with my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that yesterday, Mr. Malcolm Edwards, the commercial director of British Coal, informed the Select Committee on Energy that, if the present energy policies of National Power, PowerGen and the Government continued, the outlook would be more pessimistic than suggested in the Rothschild report which suggested that the number of pits would go down to about 14? Mr. Edwards suggested that the figure would be 12.

Is the Leader of the House also aware that, when the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill was in Committee, Associated British Ports, through its mouthpiece, Mr. Frank Layfield QC, misled the Committee? In those circumstances, will the right hon. Gentleman consider arranging an urgent debate next week on the future of the mining industry?

Mr. MacGregor: We have already had a number of debates affecting the mining industry, so I cannot promise a debate next week. I am aware of the view that one individual put to the Select Committee yesterday. The Government's aim is to create the largest economic United Kingdom coal industry that the market can support in the longer term. We do not accept that the industry will be reduced to 12 pits. The future size will depend on the performance of the industry itself. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that it is encouraging that Boyds, the United States mining engineers, has found great scope for further productivity improvements, so British Coal should be well placed to compete in price with imported coal and to secure the lion's share of the electricity market by offering competitively priced coal.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a statement either today or on Monday on the London Docklands Railway (Lewisham, etc.) Bill, and on the Government's response to the debate in Committee and on Second Reading on the Transport and Works Bill? The Minister for Shipping said in Committee that that was not the place to talk about the level of alcohol that a public service driver of a train or of a national bus could take.

Given the level of debate on Second Reading on 2 December and the Minister's comments in column 45 of *Hansard*, and given the comments made in Committee, it would be appropriate to find some way of ascertaining the Government's attitude on that important issue. At present, the Government say, in effect, that it is all right for a train driver to have five glasses of wine before driving a train. I raise the matter especially because it is almost 20 years since the Eltham Well Hall crash, when six people died and 126 were injured. It was one of the rare events in which a public service driver was over the limit.

Mr. MacGregor: I know that the London Docklands Railway (Lewisham, etc.) Bill has been recommended by the Chairman of Ways and Means for consideration on Monday evening. I will draw my hon. Friend's remarks to the attention of my appropriate right hon. Friend.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Is the Leader of the House aware of the great interest that has been created in Northern Ireland about the on-going constitutional debate—that is, whether there should be devolution to Scotland and Wales? Will the right hon. Gentleman give some advice on what procedures my hon. Friends and I should follow and what facilities he will make available to us and to hon. Members from elsewhere in the United Kingdom to attend debates of the Grand Committees in Scotland and Wales whenever those Committees discuss the constitutional position of Scotland and Wales?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman knows the position in relation to the Scottish Grand Committee, but I very much agree with what is behind his question: there is considerable interest throughout the United Kingdom in those constitutional matters, and rightly so because the implications go much wider than Scotland. I cannot say how that matter might be taken forward at the moment. As the hon. Gentleman will know, there are four half-day debates being given to the Scottish Grand Committee. The hon. Gentleman can be assured that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will make clear those wider implications in the debate.

Sir Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): Will my right hon. Friend consider a debate on the accommodation that is given to servants of the House who must stay overnight in this Palace, and will he examine the facilities that are offered to them? Will he also consider a change so that we ourselves, rather than the Department of the Environment, have responsibility?

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend suggests, under the Ibbs proposals, we will have responsibility for that matter from 1 April. I do not think that a debate is necessary. My hon. Friend can raise the matter through the appropriate committees that we are now setting up.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May we have an assurance that we will be given the opportunity of having four full days to consider the Budget statement, in particular because one of those days must be given to the debate on industry? I shall want to expose Volvo Bus of Sweden's secret agenda for the United Kingdom, which is to close down the British bus industry and switch its production to plants principally in Sweden.

Mr. MacGregor: On the hon. Gentleman's second point, I have frequently said to him that he must find his own way of raising that matter, and I notice that he has not yet done so. On his first point, he will know that I have not announced the Budget for next week. I must obey your strictures, Mr. Speaker, and not deal with that matter now.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week for a debate on national health service trusts? It has just been announced by the Opposition that they would abolish such trusts. A debate would give us an opportunity, among many other things, to mention the independent survey of 900 patients in eight national health service trust hospitals who had been in those hospitals

before and after they became trusts. Those patients were asked, "Is the hospital better, the same, or worse?" Forty-eight per cent. said that the hospitals were better as trusts, and about 42 per cent. said that they were much the same. Nearly 90 per cent. said that trust hospitals are either satisfactory or very satisfactory.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes his point very well, and I entirely agree with him. Indeed, it is one of the features that I hope that we will be able to debate, certainly in the coming weeks and months, the Opposition's health policy. My hon. Friend has drawn attention to the fact that all the efforts and enthusiasm of the many thousands of people making a success of NHS trust status and GP fund holding would come to naught under Labour. The patients who have clearly said that they would benefit would also find that those benefits did not continue.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I know not whether the Leader of the House heard the Radio 4 programme this morning concerning Mr. Payne, who was convicted of murder 20 or more years ago and who has served increasingly lengthy periods in prison although he has always denied the offence. On that programme, it was said that instances of interference by political appointees, either the Secretary of State for the Home Department or the Minister of State, in the decisions of the Parole Board have risen from 3 per cent. to 30 per cent. over the past five to 10 years. Bearing in mind the liberty of the citizen, will the Leader of the House arrange for an urgent debate on whether decisions on life sentences should be made by Parole Board officials or whether they should be made by the Secretary of State of the day or his officials? Often the liberty of the individual is denied for no reason at all.

Mr. MacGregor: I did not hear the broadcast this morning, so I cannot comment on it. There is no time for a debate in Government time on the matter next week.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House consider discussions through the usual channels on whether, instead of a debate on the Adjournment, the report of the Select Committee on Sittings of the House could be on a positive motion? That would perhaps allow us to agree to the report generally so that, after the election, a Government could proceed in the knowledge that the House had agreed, not on every aspect but in principle, to reform the sitting hours of the House. Many people in the House wish to see such reform.

Mr. MacGregor: I am glad that my hon. Friend has raised that point; it enables me to make clear the position on the debate that I have announced for a week on Monday. The report of the Select Committee will be published tomorrow. I am sure that the whole House will wish to see it and to join me in expressing warm thanks to my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) and the members of his Committee, including my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), for the extremely hard and swift work that they have done to enable the report to come before the House.

My hon. Friend is entirely right in intimating that there is great interest in the report. I am very much aware of that from the many representations that I have received. That is why I thought it right to give the House an early opportunity to express its views on the report and its recommendations and why I acted particularly swiftly. I hope that the House will have enough time to study the report. It is not particularly long so it should be possible for the House to do so. The form chosen for the debate —a motion of the Adjournment—is the best way to ensure an open and full debate. Thereafter we can consider how the House should move forward to take decisions on the report's recommendations.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): The Leader of the House will be aware that there is considerable interest in Wales, too, in the constitutional issue. We understand that the Secretary of State for Wales is agreeable to the Welsh Grand Committee meeting in Wales, possibly on 9 March, to discuss that very issue. Will the Leader of the House inform us whether, in the course of next week, as required under Standing Order No. 98, he will table a motion to amend the Standing Order to enable the Committee to meet on Monday 9 March? If it does not happen next week, will he give an assurance that it will happen before the appropriate date?

Mr. MacGregor: I am well aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is keen to have a debate and has suggested that it should be held in Wales. In principle, I see no objection to that; indeed, I see advantages in it. The difficulty is that it involves a change in Standing Orders. I was not aware of the deadline to which the hon. Gentleman referred. We shall have to consider that matter.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Is my right hon. Friend aware that anyone who had been holding his breath for the appearance of the Government's White Paper on railway privatisation would long ago have expired? May I assume that the reason for the delay is that sanity is beginning to prevail and that the Government intend to seek to define the problems of the railways before proposing a specific solution? That being so, will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to announce that the Government have no intention of producing a White Paper containing such solutions before the election? If he did so, he would save demands on valuable time next week.

Mr. MacGregor: I can make no such statement. All I can say is that the Government are considering the whole matter thoroughly. They are right to do so, because the issue raises major matters. Therefore, it is right for the Government to spend a good deal of time on it. I cannot give the precise timing. The matter does not need to take up a great deal of time next week.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): Will the Leader of the House reconsider initiating a debate next week on the important issue of the Government's reforms of the national health service, with special reference to the 13·8 per cent. reduction in fees for NHS treatment paid to dentists? In Bristol, 180 dentists—virtually all the NHS dentists in Bristol and Avon—met last Tuesday and took the decision that, if the Government force the 13·8 per cent. reduction in their fees for treating NHS patients, they will restrict new health service patients from 1 March and some practices will terminate the treatment of new NHS patients. Obviously, that is of great concern throughout the country and not merely in Bristol, where the Secretary of State for Health is a Member of Parliament, because dental hygiene is vital.

Mr. MacGregor: The Government continue to negotiate with dentists' representatives. A further meeting

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took place this afternoon. As part of those discussions, my right hon. and hon. Friends agreed to re-examine, in association with the dentists' representatives, detailed elements of fee levels. At the next formal meeting in May, the results of that work will be considered and fee scales set accordingly. Meanwhile, the proposed reduction in fees will not be implemented, so a debate next week is not necessary.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): Can my right hon. Friend make room next week for a debate on European Commission legislation which, it is rumoured, will allow domestic animals to be imported and exported across the channel without any check for rabies? That concerns my constituents in Southampton, where there is a large port and several marinas. The Government should do anything they can to restrict that legislation, as rabies is a killer disease for humans and for animals.

Mr. MacGregor: I share my hon. Friend's concern. I think that he knows that the Government have no intention of supporting any proposal which would increase the risk of rabies being introduced into this country. Scientific evidence on rabies control measures is being reassessed at Community level. Formal proposals from the Commission will be subject to parliamentary scrutiny in the usual way.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): A week on Monday there will be a debate on the report by the Select Committee on Sittings of the House. Would the Leader of the House consider making a change so that we might debate facilities in the House for disabled people? I remind him that last summer I brought a group of blind students from Temple Bank school for the visually handicapped in Bradford to the House. There is nowhere for them to sit and nowhere for them to have a meal, so they had to walk out, leading each other to a nearby park to have something to eat. At the same time, the private dining rooms were full of corporate hospitality, with Members wining and dining chums and using the facilities there. Those dining room bookings are not published, to maintain a cloak of secrecy.

Could we have a debate on such facilities, coupled with a debate on the report by the Select Committee on Members' Interests on the lobbying organisations which book dining rooms through Members? That report has been in the hands of the Leader of the House for two or three months, yet the report which proposes that our sitting hours should be cut and looks after the selfish interests of Members of Parliament is to be given priority. That is completely wrong.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman talks total nonsense. The report goes way beyond the question of sittings and deals with a number of other important matters of procedure. I know that the vast majority of hon. Members would agree that many Members wish the subject of sittings to be debated, considered and probably changed. That has been made clear to me throughout my time as Leader of the House, and that is what all the pressure has been for. Therefore, it is right for us to give early consideration to the report of the Committee. That would be the wish of most hon. Members.

On the other matters which the hon. Gentleman raised, it is not necessary to have a debate a week on Monday, because he will know that the appropriate Committee of the House is considering the possibility of extending refreshment facilities for Members' guests.

Mr. Cryer: That is what was said last summer.

Mr. MacGregor: The Committee is actively considering the matter. Also, as the hon. Gentleman knows, some building work will be required, and it is studying that.

On the report by the Select Committee on Members' Interests, I hope to find time for that in due course, but the Select Committee on Sittings of the House undoubtedly takes precedence.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): It has just been announced that the European Community has broken all records by spending more than £1,000 million this year on dumping high-tar tobacco in the third world and in eastern Europe. Although I appreciate that the Government can do nothing about that shameful expenditure, will the Leader of the House ensure that, next week, out of respect for the sufferers from that expenditure in the third world, the Government will not submit any more supplementary estimates to cover excessive and unlawful expenditure by the European Community?

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend knows, I have been as critical as anyone of the common agricultural policy regime on tobacco. When I was Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I endeavoured to get that policy changed substantially. The supplementary estimates were passed in accordance with the procedures of the House, following a debate. That is why they were accepted.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): When the Minister for the Environment and the Countryside returns on Monday from the important weekend conference in Estoril on ozone layer depletion, will he report to the House? There is the possibility of 300,000 skin cancers—that is not an alarmist forecast, but a NASA statistic—and if anything is to be done about that appalling prospect in the northern hemisphere, it must be done early, before the spring conditions of April and May.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall consider in what way my hon. Friend can, if appropriate, report to the House.

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): Will my right hon. Friend consider an urgent debate on the Representation of the People Act 1983, in view of the widespread practice in the student community of planning for and voting twice at parliamentary elections? Will he draw to the attention of the House the fact that that offence may result in a penalty of £2,000 as well as disfranchisement? May we have a debate to allow us to consider abuses by the student community at the ballot box?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is correct. Voting twice in a parliamentary election or byelection is an offence and it is subject to a fine of up to £2,000. I am happy to underline that fact, to which my hon. Friend rightly drew attention. I shall consider what other steps we might take to draw further attention to the issue.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): There is widespread interest on both sides of the House on the constitutional issues affecting Scotland and Wales. I wish to encourage that, because such matters should be approached constructively. Will the Leader of the House tell us whether, subsequent to the Scottish Grand Committee

sitting in Edinburgh on Monday, he will bring forward an opportunity for the other two half matter days to be taken by that Committee so that we can consider the other constitutional options open to the people of Scotland? Surely we must debate all the options before the general election.

Mr. MacGregor: I know that another two half-matter days have been proposed, but I do not know when they will be taken.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Does my right hon. Friend agree that freedom of speech and the conduct of elections are paramount to the House? Will he find time to debate those issues in light of *The Sunday Times* court ruling yesterday which prevents local authorities from taking action on libel? Isle of Wight county council threatened my previous agent, John Bull, with libel as a result of pressure from the ruling group of Liberal Democrats, for remarks that he made during the borough elections. The Liberal Democrats continue to use taxpayers' and chargepayers' money to pressurise officers of the county council to try to gag proper debate on the Isle of Wight.

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot promise my hon. Friend a debate on that matter next week, but I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend to the point that he makes. I have no doubt that my hon. Friend will find other ways of raising the matter in the House.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I was very disappointed to hear no mention in the business statement of the remaining stages of the Offshore Safety Bill. The right hon. Gentleman knows full well that it sailed through its Committee stage on Tuesday morning. It has widespread support in the House and among those people who have members of their families working offshore. There is a growing belief in Scotland that the Bill may fall by the wayside because of the forthcoming election. That would be a great shame because we have all been waiting for the Bill, which was born out of the excellent Cullen report. On behalf of all those men and women who work in our offshore installations and standby vessels, I make a plea to the right hon. Gentleman that he bring the Bill to the Floor of the House for its remaining stages as soon as possible.

Mr. MacGregor: As the House knows, I am trying to accommodate as many Bills as possible, as quickly as possible, bearing in mind the need to give them full and proper consideration. I entirely agree about the importance of getting that Bill on the statute book, and I hope that we shall be able to do so.

Sir Michael Neubert (Romford): Will there be an opportunity next week to debate early-day motion 710?

[That this House calls on the Secretary of State for the Home Department to take the necessary steps to ensure that all television programmes, including party political broadcasts, on all channels, which report on, or comment on, political matters are signed and subtitled, so that the two and a half million people who are deaf or hard of hearing are put on a par with the general hearing public in the run up to the general election.]

It proposes that all political broadcasts on television be signed and subtitled for the deaf and hard of hearing. Would not such a proposal inflict unnecessary suffering on many people? Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while there can be few advantages to the distressing disability of deafness, not hearing party political broadcasts must be one of them?

Mr. MacGregor: I was about to give my hon. Friend a different answer, because I thought that his question would go in a different direction. As he will know, programme content and scheduling are matters for the broadcasters, not for the Government. In this case, it is for them to decide.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Could the Leader of the House arrange, before the debate on inflation next week, for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to make a statement on how he proposes to establish the financial arrangements for community-based training programmes? They have done an excellent job in the past, but they are under pressure at present, despite the fact that they have done a great deal, throughout the Province, to help young people and to keep them out of the hands of the paramilitaries.

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful for what the hon. Gentleman says about those programmes, and I shall draw his request to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Will it be possible to have an early debate on early-day motion 263 in the name of the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) and myself?

[That this House opposes proposals arising from the review of its regional organisation by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; considers that the proposal to reduce the Ministry's five regional and divisional offices in Eastern England to one regional centre at Cambridge will substantially diminish its service to the farming community in that region, will reduce the effectiveness of such conservation schemes as the environmentally sensitive areas and set aside schemes and will prevent the Ministry from implementing EC proposals for reforming the Common Agricultural Policy; and calls for the Ministry to establish a second regional centre in Norwich.]

It criticises proposals for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to reduce the number of offices in eastern England from five to one. Will my right hon. Friend particularly bear in mind the fact that the matter needs to be reviewed in the light of the recent volte-face by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food office in Truro?

Mr. MacGregor: I am familiar with the situation. The concentration of administrative work at fewer regional centres will significantly improve the cost-effectiveness of the operations of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, including the service that it provides to its customers. The matter has been thoroughly aired, and I cannot promise a debate on it in Government time next week.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): The Home Secretary has written to inform me that 11 million summonses have been issued for non-payment of the poll tax. Can we debate next week the legislation that demands that local authorities prosecute the estates of people who have died for their share of the poll tax, particularly in the case of many of my constituents, whose estates cannot even pay for their funerals?

Mr. MacGregor: I see no way in which that issue can be raised in the business that I have announced for next week.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will my right hon. Friend consider his reply to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who asked for more Opposition day debates? Will he consider, in the light of developments this week, having such a debate next week? Is he aware that this week in the Chamber the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) was unable to name a single strike that the Labour party had condemned in the past 13 years? Is he also aware that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) was unable to name a single economist who approved of increasing taxes as a way out of recession? Would not an Opposition day debate next week give the public an opportunity to see that, when the Labour party has to answer questions on its policies, those answers are about as straight as a right-angled bend?

Mr. MacGregor: I am glad to tell my hon. Friend that a number of the points that he raises can be discussed during our debate next Wednesday. There can be no doubt that the Labour party's policies on taxation and, inevitably, on borrowing—given its high spending policies—will lead to inflation. Therefore, the issue will be directly relevant to next Wednesday's debate. It will be interesting to see which speakers the Opposition choose for that debate. Whoever they are, I am quite sure that we shall have the same resounding victory next week as we did this week when comparing the policies of the two parties.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): According to the best available estimates, including a parliamentary answer, more than 3 per cent. of the population are missing from the electoral register. That is unique in this country in modern times, and it is a serious issue that should concern Conservative Members—indeed, any hon. Member. May we have a statement next week, together with full details of the figures, constituency by constituency, on the current electoral register as electoral returning officers had until last Sunday to return the complete figures, which are now available in the Department of Health, and which it will not reveal to the House? We need a full, frank investigation of the current position before we move closer to the general election. Today is the last day for sending in registration details if there is to be a general election on 9 April. We are now in the final position, so we need the final information so that we can discuss it.

Mr. MacGregor: I have noticed, week after week, the hon. Gentleman's obsession with the electoral register. I think that there must be something other than he suggests behind his concern. He is obviously getting even more apprehensive as the general election approaches. It is entirely up to the individual, who is always encouraged to register for voting. The Government spend about half a million pounds every year on publicity to encourage people to register, so we are doing everything that we can in the way of encouragement.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): My right hon. Friend is renowned for being a fair person. May I refer him to Wednesday's debate on inflation? Does he appreciate that, inadvertently, he will cause the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer to offer his broad back to the knife throwers behind him. I offer my right hon. Friend a solution: he should invite my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to open on behalf of the Government so that we can flush out Her Majesty's Leader of the Opposition and listen to his solutions, once and for all, to our economic problems.

Mr. MacGregor: I assure my hon. Friend that my action was not inadvertent. I am looking forward to hearing what the Opposition spokesmen say in next week's debate on inflation. Perhaps the right solution would be for both of them to speak so that we could spot the differences.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May we have a statement next week on moving mentally handicapped people from hospitals into the community? Will the Leader of the House urge the Secretary of State for Health to investigate what is happening at Westwood hospital, in Bradford? Is he aware that that hospital is being emptied, and there is widespread suspicion that the local health authority hopes that it will become empty next year when it can be closed without the inconvenience of having to consult properly with the community or obtain the permission and approval of the Secretary of State for Health? Surely that is a scandal, and the clear intention behind the secret closure of the hospital is to enable the community health trust to flog off the hospital and its extensive grounds for an enormous profit. That scandal should be investigated, the patients should be prevented from being removed, there should be a proper investigation, and proper procedures should be observed.

Mr. MacGregor: From the information that is available to me, the hon. Gentleman is wide of the mark. Bradford health authority conducted a full public consultation between August and November 1990 on its proposals for the development of services for people with learning disabilities, and that included the future role of Westwood hospital. It is currently consulting the community health council about the next phase of those plans. The health authority has confirmed that it will continue to consult with the health council and other interested parties on its proposals. There is widespread public consultation, so it would not be appropriate to have a debate next week.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Is my right hon. Friend aware that a letter which is circulating in Battersea purports to show that a certain Mr. Phil Brown is a Liberal Democrat councillor for the area? Given that there is not a single Liberal Democrat councillor in the London borough of Wandsworth, and that in the constituency of Battersea there was not even a single Liberal Democrat candidate at the last borough elections, could my right hon. Friend arrange for a statement next week by the Secretary of State for the Environment so that we can discuss the legality of the use of the word "councillor" and so that the Liberal Democrat spokesman on that subject can explain this disreputible, dirty trick?

Mr. MacGregor: I think that my hon. Friend will wish strongly to pursue the matter locally. If I heard him aright, it seems that the Liberal Democrats are trying to establish that they have a presence in that area when they certainly have not.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Has the Leader of the House read early-day motion 713?

[That this House deplores the actions of Dr. Gwyn Jones in obtaining a grant of £16,895 in July 1988 under false pretences from the Welsh Development Agency Rural Conversion Grant Scheme, four months after being appointed Chairman-designate of the Welsh Development Agency; notes that the grant was awarded for converting the Old Flour Mill at Porthmadog into craft workshops, whereas in the event it was converted into residential accommodation; notes further that Dr. Jones has recently made a partial repayment of the grant of £3,395; and urges the Agency to seek repayment in full from its Chairman, lest any other Chairman-designate of any public body follows his example in attempting to defraud the body of which they are about to become Chairman.]

It has been signed by me and seven other hon. Members and severely criticises the conduct of the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency, Dr. Gwyn Jones, for obtaining a grant of £17,000 from the WDA while he was chairman-designate of the agency for building craft workshops in Porthmadog.

Could the Leader of the House arrange for a statement by the Secretary of State for Wales, as I understand from yesterday's proceedings of the Public Accounts Committee that a minor repayment of £3,395 has now been made by Dr. Jones to the agency which he chairs? The repayments started only three weeks ago, whereas Dr. Jones was warned by Mr. Evan Lloyd Jones, the monitoring officer for the agency for north Wales, that the development at the old flour mill in Porthmadog was not craft workshops and did not comply with the terms for a grant under the rural conversion grant scheme.

Will the right hon. Gentleman also arrange for a statement by the Secretary of State on nominated bodies that are staffed and stuffed with Tory rejects and are the means that the Government use to rule Wales? That should shortly come to an end.

Mr. MacGregor: I understand that, at yesterday's meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to which the hon. Gentleman referred, the agency's accounting officer promised a full note.

Several Hon. Members *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall call the hon. Members who are standing, but I ask them to be brief because we need to move on to the next debate.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May we have a debate next week on the "Can't pay, won't pay" campaign which is being conducted by people who are best described as poll tax parasites? In that debate we could highlight the fact that those people are trying to unload their local government costs and the legal costs that they incur on to their honest, law-abiding tax-paying neighbours.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes a fair point that law-abiding, tax-paying citizens are having to pay for the non-payment by others of the community charge. We have deplored that on many occasions and will continue to do so.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): On Monday's business, has my right hon. Friend received a clear indication from the Labour Opposition that they will support the prevention of terrorism order or, as I suspect, does my right hon. Friend know that they will be soft on terrorism again and will not support the order?

Mr. MacGregor: That is not a matter for me, but at the moment I am not aware of what the Opposition's stance will be.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): As he has visited Bristol twice in the past few weeks and has been warmly welcomed by the residents of that great city, my right hon. Friend will be aware that Avon county council has refused to use the criminal law to evict travellers from illegal sites. Consequently, my constituents in Royate hill have for 15 months suffered death threats, violence, crime and squalor. Is it not about time that we had a debate not just on travellers' needs but on residents' rights? May we have a debate on amending the Caravan Sites Act 1968 and section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986?

Mr. MacGregor: I know of the strong feeling that exists in my hon. Friend's constituency. As he rightly pointed out, I have visited it twice in recent months, and on both occasions the matter was raised with me with considerable force and vigour. I sympathise, and understand exactly why that is so.

I am aware that concern is felt about the operation of the Acts that my hon. Friend mentioned. We shall certainly have to turn our attention to that matter, but I am afraid that it will not be possible to debate it next week.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have a debate next week on the difficulties experienced by insulin-dependent diabetics? Although they are grateful for the Government's sanctioning of free autolet needles, they are seeking an extension to the free prescribing of pen needles, for which there is an urgent need in particular cases. A specific group in my constituency is experiencing such a need, but I believe that it exists throughout the country.

Mr. MacGregor: The Department of Health recognises that injection pens offer a convenient alternative to disposable syringes, which are already on prescription, but the cost is significant. A decision to make them available on prescription must therefore be made in the light of available resources and other competing priorities. Pens and other needles may be provided free through a hospital when a consultant considers them necessary on clinical grounds.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): May we have an early debate on the gross misuse of stolen Government documents by Opposition Members? Would not that give us an opportunity to discuss the appalling double standards shown by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the shadow Secretary of State for Health, who seems content to use and receive stolen property for his own political devices, but who, when his source appears to dry up, suddenly becomes enamoured of the idea of a freedom of information Act that would make his irresponsible and deceitful actions wholly illegal?

Mr. MacGregor: I note that, so far, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) has favoured highly selective leaks. He seems to disaprove of all leaks other than those for which he is responsible.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): May I revert to the request by my hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens), who drew attention to the urgent need for a debate on the national health service next week? A debate would give many of us an opportunity to

[Mr. Bob Dunn]

highlight the success of general practitioner budget holding—especially in Longfield and New Ash Green, in the Dartford constituency, which contains one of the first waves of budget holders. Perhaps, during the same debate, we could wish every success to the Dartford East health centre, which will adopt budget holding from 1 April.

Mr. MacGregor: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I hope that, in the coming weeks and months, the House will have many opportunities to debate the issue, and to highlight the fact that GP fund-holding measures are working extremely well—and that the Labour party is making a great mistake by pledging to get rid of them.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate next week on the administration of justice in Greater London, and, in particular, on the independence of magistrates? A view is circulating in Greater London—it is, in fact, the view of the Greater London Labour party—that magistrates should be subject to party discipline, and should follow what is described as the party line on justice. I do not know what that means, but it sounds extremely sinister. I think that we should establish, and let people in London know, precisely what Labour means by this.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not know what that means, and I do not know too much about it at this stage; but I hope that my hon. Friend will pursue the matter further. Certainly, if what he has described were the case, it would be absolutely deplorable.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Given the imminence of the general election, may we have a debate, as a matter of urgency, on the funding of political parties so that we can discuss—among other things—the recent £500-a-head Labour party fund-raising dinner? Does my right hon. Friend consider that the main significance of the dinner is the fact that only people who can afford to £500 for a dinner can afford to vote Labour, or the fact that only under a Tory Government can people afford to spend so much on such a daft dinner?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes his point in his own inimitable way. Certainly the disposable income of a large number of people throughout the country would be substantially reduced—considerably reduced—if Labour were ever in a position to carry out its tax and spending policies.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): With the general election not too far away, would it not be a good idea to debate some more substantial issues before it is called? The Prime Minister has said that he believes in a classless society. Why do we not have a proper debate about that before the election? Why do we not have a debate about the fact that if there is to be a classless society we shall need to get rid of the House of Lords, the honours list, tax-assisted private education, private health treatment and queue-jumping? And it would not be a bad idea if we were to have a debate about taxing the Queen's income.

Mr. MacGregor: I should be very happy at some point to have a debate about the classless society. In such a debate, we could point out that the average living standard of people in this country has risen by about one third in real terms during the period of the Conservative Government, that 4 million people have become home owners for the first time, that personal pensions and occupational pensions have been hugely extended, and that the savings of so many people have greatly risen. Such a debate would enable us also to point out that many of the other changes we have introduced have been actively used by members of the Labour party, to their benefit. There is no doubt that the classless and much wider owner-occupying society has been achieved by the Conservative party. The Labour policies about which we are beginning to hear would set that back greatly.

Carley Reavill

4.31 pm

Dr. Cunningham (Copeland): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During Prime Minister's Questions today my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) put to the Prime Minister a question concerning the appalling tragedy that had befallen Carley Reavill. May we have it on the record that the Prime Minister seems to have been misadvised about this tragic case? Dr. Alison Shurtz has confirmed that Carley was diagnosed as having meningitis shortly after arrival at Queen Elizabeth II hospital, and she would have been transferred to another hospital if an intensive paediatric care bed had been available. Dr. Duncan Matthews, of the Great Ormond Street hospital, has said that critically ill children are being denied intensive care treatment because there is not any money to make beds available. It was the shortage of beds, caused by the shortage of funding in the national health service, that led to this appalling tragedy.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: This is not a point of order for me. It seems to be a continuation of Question Time.

Mr. Dickens: I promise——

Mr. Speaker: Try to make it a point of order for me.

Mr. Dickens: Do you, Mr. Speaker, think that it would be helpful to you and to the House to know where that information came from so that a judgment might be made?

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that it would be helpful to me. This is not a point of order for me.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together the four Questions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

COMMONWEALTH DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

That the draft Commonwealth Development Corporation (Raising of Limits on Borrowing and Advances) Order 1992 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft Representation of the People (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1992 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Representation of the People (Amendment) Regulations 1992 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft European Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Regulations 1992 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Transport and Works Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

4.32 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware of the political law of detailed explanation. Normally when a Minister has given a detailed reason why something cannot happen, life changes—for example, when it is explained in detail why a polytechnic cannot be called a university, and within six months the Government change their policy and bring in a Bill to allow that change; or when a Minister explains the practical advantages of the community charge, and a short time later the community charge is changed to the council tax; or when it is explained why HIV victims cannot be compensated and then there is a change. That normally comes about because, when a Minister gives a detailed explanation, it is possible to engage in debate and the Government can review their proposals.

As it is not easy to extend the time for Second Reading of a Bill—this Bill had a half-day Second Reading debate—and as there are rules about what may be considered on Report, might my hon. Friend the Minister be invited to see whether, between now and the time when the Bill goes to another place, he can find some means of meeting, in private if not in public, an all-party delegation to consider whether the limits for public service vehicle drivers proposed in the Bill, which, if the Bill is passed, can be changed by regulation, might be reduced?

Mr. Speaker: That is surely a matter that could be raised on Third Reading. I imagine that it forms part of the Bill and that it can therefore be raised on Third Reading.

Mr. Bottomley: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful for your guidance. I had assumed that what was not in the Bill, which is a different set of limits, could not be discussed. This is not the time to go through what happened in Committee. It is worth pointing out, however, that, on the eighth day of the Committee, a very detailed opening discussion, or Second Reading discussion, was introduced by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). Other hon. Members, who were not members of the Committee, would, I believe, have liked to take part in that debate. I suspect that your guidance will be useful to the House. It may also be that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will want to consider my suggestion.

Mr. Speaker: It will be for the hon. Member to raise that matter on Third Reading, if he catches the eye of the Chair. If the hon. Gentleman asks the Minister to see a delegation, I have no doubt that he will be willing to do so.

New clause 2

MAINTENANCE OF FOOTPATHS AND BRIDLEWAYS

".—(1) Section 36 of the Highways Act 1980 (highways maintainable at public expense) shall be amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (2), at the end of paragraph (c), the word "and" shall be omitted.

(3) After paragraph (d) of subsection (2), there shall be added—

"(e) a highway, being a footpath or bridleway, created in consequence of a rail crossing diversion order, or of an order made under section 14 or 16 of the Harbours Act 1964, or of an order made under section 1 or 3 of the Transport and Works Act 1992."

(4) After subsection (3) there shall be inserted—

"(3A) Paragraph (e) of subsection (2) above shall not apply to a footpath or bridleway, or to any part of a footpath or bridleway, which by virtue of an order of a kind referred to in that subsection is maintainable otherwise than at the public expense.".'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this, it will be convenient to consider Government amendments Nos. 43 and 52.

Mr. McLoughlin: The new clause arises from the constructive discussions that we have held with the Rights of Way Review Committee on the provisions in the Bill relating to footpaths and from promises given in Committee. It amends section 36 of the Highways Act 1980 so that new paths or ways created as a consequence of rail crossing diversion orders or harbour orders or works orders made under clauses 1 or 3 of the Bill will be maintained at public expense, except where that is not appropriate—for example, that part of a new right of way which crosses a railway, where responsibility for maintenance must rest with the operator. The new clause, combined with amendment No. 43, offers the necessary flexibility to ensure that appropriate and comprehensive arrangements for maintenance can be made by the Secretary of State in confirming a rail crossing diversion order or in making a harbour or transport works order. Amendment No. 52 is a consequential small repeal, of section 36(2) of the Highways Act. I commend the new clause, and the amendments, as I have said, achieve what the Rights of Way Review Committee wants.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Hon. Members who served on the Committee, as well as all other hon. Members, will be grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for that explanation. It clarifies the position relating to section 36 of the Highways Act to which the Under-Secretary referred. It goes a long way —indeed, I believe that it goes the entire way; let me be placatory at this early stage—towards meeting the assurance that the Under-Secretary gave in Committee, for which we are grateful.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 8

FOOTPATHS AND BRIDLEWAYS OVER RAILWAYS

'.—(1) This section applies where—

(a) a public right of way over a footpath or bridleway crosses a railway or tramway otherwise than by a tunnel or bridge,

(b) the operator of the railway or tramway has made a closure or diversion application in respect of the crossing, and

(c) in the opinion of the Secretary of State the crossing constitutes a danger to members of the public using it or likely to use it.

(2) The Secretary of State may by order require the operator to provide a tunnel or a bridge, or to improve an existing tunnel or bridge, to carry the path or way over or under the railway or tramway at or reasonably near to the crossing to which the closure or diversion application relates.

(3) An order under this section may include particulars as to the tunnel or bridge which is to be provided or as to the improvements which are to be made.

(4) The Secretary of State shall not make an order under this section after the end of the period of two years beginning with the day on which the closure or diversion application is made, and not less than two months before making an order he shall give written notice of his proposal to make the order to the operator and to each local authority in whose area the crossing (or any proposed new crossing) is situated.

(5) A notice given under subsection (4) above must be accompanied by a draft of the proposed order under this section; and any order eventually made may include modifications of the draft.

(6) An operator shall not be regarded as in breach of a duty imposed by an order under this section if he has used his best endeavours to comply with the order.

(7) Where an operator is required by an order under this section to provide or improve a bridge or tunnel, but is unable to do so because he does not have the powers or rights (including rights over land) needed for the purpose, he shall not be taken to have used his best endeavours to comply with the order unless he has used his best endeavours to obtain those powers or rights (whether by means of an order under section 1 above or otherwise).

(8) In this section—

"bridleway" has the same meaning as in the Highways Act 1980;

"closure or diversion application" means—

(a) an application made under section 6 above, or

(b) a request made in accordance with section 120(3A)(aa) of the Highways Act 1980,

for an order by virtue of which a public right of way would be extinguished or diverted;

"footpath" has the same meaning as in the Highways Act 1980;

"local authority" means a county council, a district council, a London borough council, the Common Council of the City of London, a parish or community council and a parish meeting of a parish not having a separate parish council;

"operator", in relation to a railway or tramway, means any person carrying on an undertaking which includes maintaining the permanent way.'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. McLoughlin: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider the following: Government new clause 6—*Amendment of Level Crossings Act 1983.*

Government new clause 7—*Orders under Transport Act 1968.*

Government amendments Nos. 96 and 97.

Mr. McLoughlin: New clause 8 meets an undertaking given in Committee to introduce a power for the Secretary of State to compel a railway or tramway operator to provide a bridge or tunnel as a replacement for a footpath or bridleway level crossing. This might be constructed either on the site of the crossing or at another reasonably convenient location to which the path or way could be

diverted. In some cases, it may be cheaper or more appropriate to improve a nearby bridge or tunnel to take a diverted right of way, and an order may require this instead. We have consulted on this proposal and it has been widely welcomed.

The intention is that the railway or tramway operator will identify potentially dangerous crossings in the first instance, using as criteria the guidance recently issued by the railway inspectorate, on which comments are being sought. It is right that this responsibility should remain with the operator. BR is currently surveying all its footpath crossings, beginning with those on high-speed lines.

Where a crossing is identified as unsafe and, following consultation with the council and other parties, it appears that a stopping-up or a simple diversion to another crossing point is not appropriate, the Secretary of State may step in and propose a bridge or tunnel order. Where all the interested parties agree that a bridge or tunnel is necessary, the Secretary of State will be able to give notice of a bridge or tunnel order at the same time as the operator applies for a diversion or extinguishment order. If a works order under part I is required, that could be dealt with concurrently.

An inquiry may be necessary to decide whether it is reasonably practicable to retain a crossing and to make it safe for use by the public. In such cases it would be premature to publish a draft bridge order as that would prejudice the outcome of the operator's application. If the inquiry inspector recommended that a crossing was unsafe and could not be made safe, but should not be closed, a structure would be needed and the Secretary of State would consider making an order. The Department of the Environment and the Department of Transport will make all the administrative arrangements to ensure that each is aware of the diversion and extinguishment applications.

That meets a commitment given in Committee, which was widely accepted.

Mr. Snape: One question that arises directly from the Minister's speech is, who pays? The Minister said that the responsibility would lie with the railway or tramway operator once they have identified a level crossing or footpath that is considered to be unsafe. I said on behalf of the Opposition during a similar debate in Committee that we would be unwilling to see a greater financial burden placed upon British Rail, perhaps at the expense of railway services.

In Committee we used the example of a level crossing in Doncaster where tragic fatalities occurred comparatively recently. Can the Minister turn his mind to the future of that crossing? Does he feel that that crossing would be covered by the provisions of the new clause? That crossing goes over no fewer than four or five running tracks and a goods loop or a siding. Obviously, any alternative, whether a bridge or a tunnel, would be expensive. In those circumstances, it is all very well to say that the Secretaries of State for Transport and the Environment would give the authority, but who would sign the cheques?

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): I should like to follow the point made by the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape). It would be churlish not to thank my hon. Friend the Minister for his courtesy and help on the points that I have raised directly with him. I spoke on Second Reading, but I did not serve on the Committee.

Does my hon. Friend agree that the proposition that a level crossing is a cost to be borne by the railways and that it should be part of their expenses and shown in their accounts is another example, of which dozens could be listed if it were in order to do so, that will show that it is always the railways that are expected to bear the cost when road meets rail. Road transport has all its track costs borne by the taxpayer. It is the same for the British Transport police. A total of £40 million is shown for them on the railways books, but all the costs of road policing are borne by the taxpayer.

Does my hon. Friend agree that if, at some future date, we are to have a discussion about railway policy, the question of who pays when there are historic hangovers such as level crossings needs to be tackled? I am sure that the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East would agree that it could be done on a bipartisan basis. Perhaps my hon. Friend will recognise that this is an ongoing problem. Level crossings are just one example of a wider problem.

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): The Minister will recollect that, in Committee, although we welcomed a clause such as this, I raised the question of the disabled. In the past, when bridges have been constructed, the disabled have not been considered. Whose responsibility will that be now? Does it rest with the local authority and local planning committee, with British Rail or with the construction company operating the crossing? We know that there are various crossings in Britain to which the disabled do not have access and where they have to travel many miles before they can cross. Whose responsibility will that be?

4.45 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I welcome the new clause and the amendments. I am pleased that the Minister has met the points that we raised. Like my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), I should like to know who will pay and, more importantly, how many orders there will be. There is no point putting the provision in the Bill if, in practical terms, there will not be any.

As I understand it, British Rail identified in its legislation on east coast main line safety that 11 crossings were causing concern. I understand that negotiations on two of the crossings are at an advanced stage. That leaves nine crossings. Can the Minister tell us whether any of those nine will be the subject of a tunnel or a bridge, particularly the one at South Mimms, which is on the London way and is probably the most controversial? Has British Rail now agreed to drop the east coast safety measures in view of the fact that they will effectively be overtaken by this legislation?

We know that some of the regulations under the Bill will not come into force for some time, but I hope that the Minister can confirm that the level crossing provisions and the safety measures related to them will come into force quickly and that it will be possible for British Rail to start constructing bridges or tunnels, where it is deemed necessary, at an early stage.

Mr. McLoughlin: I hope that I can go some way to helping my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr.

[Mr. McLoughlin]

Adley). I am grateful for his thanks for meeting him and the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) during the passage of the Bill.

Where a bridge or tunnel order has been made, the Department will pay a grant to British Rail in England and Wales under EC regulation 1192/69. The regulation prescribes that the grant shall be equal to the proportion of the cost borne by the railway operator, less any additional costs for modification made at the request of British Rail and the value of any benefit that British Rail derives from work carried out. That means that the grant proportion is likely to be higher than the 50 per cent. grant payable for level crossings. Because of that, we estimate that the annual grant expenditure, assuming 10 orders for foot bridges, would be nearly £2 million rather than the initial figure of about £1 million that I mentioned in Committee.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) asked about the east coast main line legislation that is presently before the House. It is for British Rail to decide how it wishes to proceed with that legislation. It will want to take into account what happens with this Bill if it reaches the statute book.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish also asked about crossings, particularly the one at South Mimms. I would rather not try to answer him today, but I shall write to him and suggest what I think will be the outcome of any discussions on that.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 6

Amendment of Level Crossings Act 1983

'.—In section 1 of the Level Crossings Act 1983 (safety arrangements at level crossings) in subsection (11), for the definition of "operator" there shall be substituted—

"'operator'", in relation to a crossing, means any person carrying on an undertaking which includes maintaining the permanent way;".'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 7

Orders under Transport Act 1968

'.—Section 124 of the Transport Act 1968 (which gives the Secretary of State power to impose obligations in respect of level crossings), in its application in England and Wales, shall cease to have effect.'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 9

Exclusion of hackney carriage legislation

'.—(1) In section 4 of the Metropolitan Public Carriage Act 1869 (interpretation) in the definition of "hackney carriage", for the words "not a stage carriage" there shall be substituted the words "neither a stage carriage nor a tramcar".

(2) In section 4 of the London Cab Act 1968 (display of signs etc) in subsection (5) in the definition of "private hire-car", after the words "public service vehicle" there shall be inserted the words "or tramcar".

(3) In section 80 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 (interpretation) in subsection (1) in the definition of "private hire vehicle", after the words "London cab" there shall be inserted the words "or tramcar".'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. McLoughlin: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Government amendments Nos. 88 to 92.

Mr. McLoughlin: The proposed new clause and amendments deal with a topic that has not so far been considered in connection with the Bill—hackney carriage legislation. The Joint Committee, in its report on private Bill procedure, said that tramway legislation needed considerable updating and revision to meet modern requirements. Elsewhere in the Bill we have been able to do that in relation to safety. Here, we are proposing to deal with the regulatory aspects. The Tramways Act 1870 introduced a system for regulating the conduct of drivers and passengers and for the licensing and operational conditions of vehicles by applying existing hackney carriage legislation that dated from 1847. That legislation covered horse-drawn vehicles and it might well have been sensible to bring tramways under the same controls when trams were horse drawn. However, that seems wholly inappropriate in the context of modern tramcar and light railway vehicles.

It could also lead to some bizarre circumstances. As the letter of the law stands at present, a constable who was convinced that a tram driver was behaving erratically could take over the tram and its horses and drive them to the nearest livery stables. The law would also impose on the driver of the tram in, say, Croydon, if that scheme succeeds, the need to pass the taxi drivers' knowledge examination. I do not think that that would be sensible.

The new clause will put trams in much the same position as buses, which is why clause 58 applies to trams some of the provisions of the bus legislation contained in the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981. In the matter of safety, trams will remain under the supervision of Her Majesty's railway inspectorate.

I commend the new clause to the House. With other provisions in the Bill, it will help to update the legislation governing the tramcar.

Mr. Snape: Clearly, this is the last time for a while that we shall approach the legislation in such harmony. We note what the Minister says and, again, it appears to make a great deal of sense.

It is probably out of order for me to ask this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I shall do so anyway—it is, of course, fatal to draw Mr. Deputy Speaker's attention to such a breach of conduct. It seems that many aspects of the London Cab Act 1968 and previous taxi carriage legislation need to be updated, including not only the definition of tramcars but, for example, the six-mile limit from the Palace of Westminster which appears to be based on the days when cabs were pulled by horses. There certainly appears to be no justification for that legislation to remain in the latter part of the 20th century.

We welcome the attempt to tidy up the legislation. We hope that, in the last few weeks remaining to the Minister in his present post, he will reconsider some of the other and, in our view, greater anomalies of the legislation.

Mr. Fearn: The Minister will recollect that many of us spoke about tramcars when the Bill was in Committee, and many of us mentioned Blackpool. Having spoken to tramcar persons—especially the drivers and conductors in Blackpool—we know that they are worried about any legislation that will alter what they are doing. Will the Minister reassure them that there will be no alteration to the way in which they operate at present?

Mr. McLoughlin: I knew that the Tramways Act 1846, with which we are all conversant, would lead to some debate.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) spoke about what might happen in the next few weeks. He obviously knows something that we do not. I look forward to many more months of further exchanges at the Dispatch Boxes with us both in our respective positions. The hon. Gentleman asked a valid question about hackney carriages and the old legislation. He will know that a working party is currently considering hackney carriages and public minicab regulations in London. I hope that we can reach a common agreement when the report is published.

I assure the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) that there is no intention to change the way in which Blackpool tram drivers, whom we see at least every other year—if not more often—operate.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 1

PROCEDURE WHERE SECRETARY OF STATE OVERRULES RESULT OF INQUIRY

'. Where, following a public local inquiry pursuant to section 11 above, the Secretary of State makes an order modifying or overruling the recommendation of the person appointed by him to hear objections, such an order shall be subject to annulment by a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett.]*

Brought up and read the First time.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may consider the following amendments: No. 101, in clause 1, page 1, line 17, at end insert

'provided that no such order may be made unless a draft thereof has been laid before and approved by resolution of both Houses of Parliament.'.

No. 102, in page 1, line 17, at end insert

'which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.

No. 103, in clause 3, page 2, line 15, at end insert

'which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.

No. 110, in clause 8, page 4, line 30, at end insert

'subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament'.

Mr. Bennett: The new clause deals with one of the essential principles of the way in which we are changing the private Bill procedure and—I hope—getting rid of many such Bills from the House of Commons.

I think that most hon. Members would be very happy if we could pass responsibility for enacting legislation which is currently introduced in private Bills to local communities and local people. However, we would not be very happy if Parliament were to give up its powers, duties and rights to the Secretary of State. That is the issue covered in the new clause and some of the associated amendments.

I understand perfectly that it is far better to hold a local public inquiry at which local people can put their case to the inspector than having people come to London—perhaps from the north of England—to put their views to a Committee of four hon. Members. One of those hon. Members has a casting vote and is there, so to speak, in a double capacity. Often, hon. Members are not especially interested in the issue—in fact, they must be disinterested parties, because they have a semi-judicial role. They may have to sit for many hours being told about local circumstances. Although they can visit the area involved, they do not have a great deal of knowledge. That is a very unsatisfactory procedure and it is far better—as the legislation provides—for people to be able to express their views to a local inspector.

If the local inspector hears their views, reaches a balanced judgment and makes recommendations to the Secretary of State who implements them, that seems eminently more sensible than the present private Bill procedure. Of course, if the scheme is of national significance, it is reasonable that Parliament should judge whether the principle should be accepted and the detail considered by an inquiry.

There might occasionally be arguments about whether a scheme is of national or local significance, but an amendment that was tabled to deal with that issue was not selected, although the Minister could not resolve the problem in Committee. He said merely that it was always easy to tell whether a scheme was of national or local significance, but when we tested him on one or two schemes, he could not answer.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does my hon. Friend realise that, following his logic, it would in the end be for the House to have the powers to decide on a matter of doubt whether an issue was of national or local significance?

Mr. Bennett: Yes, I certainly tried to argue that in Committee and I tabled an amendment to that effect, but it was not selected.

I still believe that there is a problem—I hope that someone in another place will return to this issue—in deciding what is of national or local significance. Assuming that it is approved by Parliament, because it is of national significance, or it is referred directly to an inquiry by the Secretary of State, because it is of local significance, I envisage no problems, as long as the inspector makes a recommendation which is then made law by the Secretary of State. I envisage that problems will occur if the Secretary of State decides to take a different decision from that recommended to him by the inspector or if he decides to modify the recommendations substantially. At that point, Parliament should have the right to exercise a final judgment in the matter if there is a disagreement between the inspector and the Secretary of State.

We all know that, in most such cases, political pressure of one sort or another will have entered the equation. I have no doubt that, when the Minister replies, he will hold up his hands in horror and say that, when he gets the

[Mr. Bennett]

inspector's report, he does not let anyone else influence him. He will say that he merely reads what the inspector has said and arrives at a conclusion.

Mr. Spearing *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Bennett: However, as my hon. Friend indicates, we all know that that does not happen. Of course, the Minister or the Secretary of State dealing with such an issue takes political considerations into account. There is nothing wrong with that in a democracy—in fact, we should be proud of the fact that Ministers respond to political arguments.

There is no problem with that, but if a Minister responds to a political problem, in the end it should be up to Parliament to decide whether that Minister has responded correctly or incorrectly to the political arguments and whether he should have followed the inspector's directions or suggestions. The amendment simply says that, in the relatively rare circumstance of the Minister's disagreeing with the inspector, the final decision should come back to Parliament. It would not introduce a complicated procedure—we have aimed for almost the minimum amount of parliamentary accountability—but in those circumstances Parliament should retain the last word. We should not hand over to the Secretary of State the power to make political judgments.

I hope that, at this late stage, the Minister will be able to find a way of accommodating the views expressed in Committee, and those being expressed on Report, on this important issue.

5 pm

Mr. Spearing: I support the new clause tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). Clearly, if a Minister of the Crown reversed an inspector's public recommendation—although the recommendation would not be public until the Minister changed it—it would be right and proper for the House to have the final say. If that were written into the Bill, the Minister would, of course, bear in mind when considering his view the fact that the House would have the final say.

That is an important principle—it is what I call the "hidden gate", which Parliament provides on many issues. Those issues may not necessarily be debated, but Parliament's power is in the minds of Ministers and officials. If any part of that gate were taken away, the actions and decisions of Ministers and officials in Whitehall would be different.

I agree with my hon. Friend's new clause and will support it, but I do not believe that the restrictions and qualifications in it go anything like far enough. To the casual listener, the debate so far will have seemed to concern details about tramcars, railway crossings and bridleways. However, there is no doubt that clauses 1, 2 and 3 transfer enormous powers from Members of the House of Commons and therefore from those who sent us here to officials and Ministers in Whitehall. Nobody has denied that.

I am worried that in doing so we have left too few backstop measures at the end of the process—too few opportunities for the House to say no. The powers being transferred from the House to Whitehall represent almost the whole range of private Bills that have come to the House over the centuries. Transport Bills have included Bills in respect of canals—historically canals were the first—railways, harbours and, now, barrages in our estuaries. All works Bills relating to such matters are to be transferred to a completely new procedure. The powers exercised by an Opposed Private Bill Committee of the House are to be transferred to Whitehall.

Moreover, Ministers will exercise those powers, not by introducing a Bill in the House—a public Bill, as distinct from a privately promoted Bill—but by a single statutory instrument. Clause 1(2) says:

"The power to make orders under this section shall be exercisable by statutory instrument."

It may not be known to hon. Members, still less to members of the public who may be listening to the debate, or even seeing it, via some electronic means—I did not know it myself until my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) raised it in Committee—but there are statutory instruments that are not even susceptible to a negative procedure. As well as the range of statutory instruments that become effective only after a draft has been laid or a motion approving them has been passed by the House, there is another range of statutory instruments for whose annulment it is not possible to put down a motion in the House.

One might suppose that even those who support the principle of shifting all the private Bills about which we are talking away from the House would want there at least to be an affirmative instrument to approve the Minister's decision, which may be contained in a 300-page wodge of paper. But there is not an affirmative instrument in the Bill—the instruments will not even be subject to annulment. In other words, unless the matter is of national significance, as described by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish, the House will have no say. The matter will be in the hands of Whitehall and the Minister. Unless we agree to the amendment that would change all that to an affirmative procedure, allowing a maximum of an hour and a half's debate in the Chamber—for the House to say yes to what the Minister and the inspector have decided as a result of the public inquiry—there will be no control whatever.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish has tabled another amendment, which would make the process subject to annulment. I hope that he will speak to that amendment later, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it would at least provide some safeguards, although I do not regard those as being as good as an affirmative resolution.

We have here a statutory instrument in camouflage. When people think of statutory instruments and regulations, they think of relatively small matters of detail, such as the design of buses and other vehicles, regulations on tramcar drivers or other abstruse administrative details. But under the Bill there would be a new breed of statutory instrument which would replace the scope of a Bill authorising a railway of pretty well any length. A future subject of such a single statutory instrument could be a railway line from King's Cross halfway to the coast—the document could be 300 pages long.

Such a statutory instrument could affect my borough of Newham, where the Ove Arup plans show a tunnel under the town, and various other buildings. That provides a convenient example, because, although there would be a public inquiry, the House would not be able to make a final decision on the balance of the public advantage that

a railway would undoubtedly bring against the private disadvantage of the compulsory purchase orders that such a statutory instrument would entail.

This is a matter not only of compulsory purchase, although that is important, but of giving powers. Properly and understandably, private Bills have hitherto given their promoters powers to make byelaws and regulations on the operation of, for example, a railway system. Under the Bill, those powers could affect a system of new elevated magnetic track, such as we hear could well be introduced.

I have already mentioned coastal barrages. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish talked about the difference between local and national significance. A barrage across the Mersey has already been mentioned. Would that be a local or a national matter? A Severn barrage has been talked about for more than a century. Would that be a purely local matter for the west country and south Wales, or would it be a national matter? Certainly, if it affected electricity generation, it would be a national matter, but under the Bill the Minister would decide whether it was national or local. If the Minister or his successor decided that one of those projects—or a project in Scotland, such as a barrage across the Solway Firth—was not of national significance, the House would have no part to play.

Now we have some idea of the scope of the orders. As schedule 1 affects clauses 1 and 3, and the orders, I hope that it is in order to refer to it. It lays down in fair detail the matters that the statutory instruments can include. They may be surprising to some people outside in their scope and significance.

Schedule 1, which contains 18 paragraphs, is headed:

"Matters within sections 1 and 3",

and covers the matters that can be dealt with by statutory instrument. The paragraphs include:

"2. The carrying out of any other civil engineering or other works.

3. The acquisition of land . . .

4. The creation and extinguishment of rights over land . . .

5. The abrogation and modification of agreements relating to land.

6. The conferring on persons providing transport services of rights to use systems".

I hasten on to paragraph 9, which says:

"The making of agreements to secure the provision of police services."

That means the creation of a police force. We are all familiar with the British Transport police and there are private police forces. One will be set up at the port of Tilbury; that is a very controversial proposal. The Bill could create a Severn barrage police force, a canal police force, or a channel tunnel railway police force which would have nothing to do with the Kent constabulary or the Essex constabulary. The provision is as bland as that.

The worst and most extraordinary of all is paragraph 18, which refers to:

"The alteration of the powers of any body established by or under an Act of Parliament."

By virtue of a small paragraph which cannot be got at by the House, unless new clause 1 is accepted, any Act of Parliament relating to the powers of any body can be changed.

I think that when I came to this place, such a proposal by any Minister of any Government, whether right, left or centre, would have been thought impossible by any hon. Member. Here we have powers, not only in clauses 1 and 3, but in other clauses, to change Acts of Parliament by relatively obscure Orders in Council which cannot be prayed against by the House. A Minister can unilaterally, without any proceedings in the House, change any Act of Parliament within the defintion that I have just read. I challenge the Minister to tell me now that my interpretation of the Bill is wrong. We have been round the course already in Committee and, very unfortunately, the answer is that I am correct.

Time and again, members of the public, members of the press and Members of Parliament say that Whitehall and Ministers have too much power. We must claw back the power to the House of Commons. The Bill claws back nothing; it gives it all away—and on a quiet Thursday afternoon. I am not a betting man, but I bet that most hon. Members do not know that the Bill is giving away the rights of their constituents.

On the Solway Firth, anywhere in Scotland or anywhere where there is a coastal barrage, a railway, a tramway—I am glad to say that there will be many more railways and tramways, of which many of us are in favour —someone may go to an advice service. He may ask a Member of Parliament what he can do about a particular proposal. Unless the proposal has been designated as of national significance, the Member of Parliament can only say, "I will write to the Minister, I will see him with a delegation, I will see him in the Lobby or I will catch him when he comes to a garden fete, but I cannot do anything in Parliament."

Mr. McLoughlin: I will come to the hon. Gentleman's wider point about the police later, because to deal with it now would take longer than an intervention allows.

The hon. Gentleman must be a little more generous about the idea that we are giving away powers. Under the Bill, we seek to remove the locus standi and we shall give many more people the right to be able to appear at public inquiries, which are usually held in their locality. That has been the subject of exhaustive debates in the House on many occasions. I realise that the hon. Gentleman does not like what we are doing, but I believe that it is a greater democratisation rather than a removal of democracy.

5.15 pm

Mr. Spearing: I am extremely glad that the Minister has intervened in that way. He was very obliging in Committee, and he has been the soul of courtesy. However, he has forgotten one fundamental point. I agree, of course, that it is far better for some inquiries to be conducted locally. I am the first to understand that a bewigged and terrifying procedure in a Committee Room is far less satisfactory for some constituents than a local inquiry such as we have for planning.

However, the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure, which made this recommendation, might have looked a little further into the matter. It was perfectly possible to ensure that one of the rules for private legislation was that planning permission and local inquiries—with which we all agree—were carried out and came to a conclusion before the private Bills were laid. That would get rid of all the problems, make the private Bill procedure swifter and save hon. Members' time.

Parliament would be used as a court of appeal, which it should be, rather than as a court of first instance, which it has become with many private Bills. If it had not been for the abuse of the private Bill procedure by some people, whom the Minister knows, and even by the Government,

[Mr. Spearing]

we should not be here today. It is perfectly possible to combine local hearings and local democracy with the central powers of a central democracy of this kingdom.

I have made a long contribution, but I believe that the seriousness of the matter deserves such comment. The powers under schedule 1 are very great. I did not read out paragraph 1, which refers to:

"The construction, alteration, repair, maintenance, demolition and removal of railways, tramways, trolley vehicle systems and other transport systems within section 1(1) of this Act, waterways, roads, watercourses, buildings and other structures."

Barrages are included because they affect navigation, which is included under clause 3.

As some colleagues know, because we debated the matter in Committee, that is not the extent of the Minister's powers. A lawyer or someone conversant with legislation might look at schedule 1 and say, "The Minister's proposal is not contained here. He cannot do it under the order." Having made some inquiries, I am sorry to tell the House that the Minister's powers under the orders are even wider than the powers under schedule 1.

Under clause 1, the Secretary of State

"may make an order relating to, or to matters ancillary to, the construction or operation of a transport system of any of the following kinds".

The magic words—perhaps I should say ominous words—are "matters ancillary to" and "relating to". Let us suppose that a private person said, "The matter is not in schedule 1, it does not concern a police force, it is not this or that. The Minister cannot do it." Let us suppose that the matter went to court. The court might find that, although the matter was not covered by schedule 1, it was definitely "relating to" or "ancillary to" and the Minister would get away with it. The scope of the orders is almost beyond imagination and is certainly beyond belief.

Many people both inside and outside the House have said that the powers of the Executive have grown, are still growing and need to be diminished. Unless my amendment, which makes it necessary to have an affirmative vote in the House, or that of my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Redditch (Mr. Bennett) is passed, the power of the Executive will wax much greater. Many people will rue the day when the House loses the power of the people who sent us here to officials, Ministers and those in Whitehall who support them.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) suggested that this measure will slip through on a quiet Thursday afternoon. There was never any prospect of it being a quiet Thursday afternoon, with the hon. Gentleman and others contributing to the debate. From beginning to end, the procedures on the Bill have been full of surprises. In Committee, what appeared to be relatively modest proposals on the amendment paper, time and again became issues of great principle. The hon. Gentleman has demonstrated that again this afternoon.

I thought that this was a relatively minor proposal. Very quickly, we returned to the fundamental principles of the Bill. The new clause is described as a simple procedure whereby the Secretary of State overrules the result of an inquiry—a relatively modest suggestion, and not impossible to concede. The hon. Gentleman soon talked about extending police powers and the privatisation of police forces, and perhaps applying them to the high-speed link to the channel tunnel, Severn barrage, and so on. On this relatively small point, the hon. Gentleman built an enormous argument of principle.

I have much respect and admiration for the hon. Gentleman, as do most hon. Members, but the truth is that he does not like the Bill at all. He is totally against the transfer of planning controls from Parliament to the planning system. It is a surprise that he did not vote against Second Reading, because he is totally against the measure. He wants to hang on as long as he possibly can to control over railway planning. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that we should continue to plan railways through the archaic private Bill procedure, he should apply the same logic to highways and to the myriad of major planning matters that are dealt with through the planning procedure.

If the hon. Member for Newham, South wants to control the details of a railway, he must consider why we should not bring back to Parliament control over highway matters. He might thoroughly enjoy that. He would probably claw back great powers from the Executive, but I am not sure whether that would help our constituents. It certainly would not streamline the planning procedures or get things done, but it would certainly bog down Parliament in a vast quantity of detail and not be efficient. With this proposal, the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) are clinging on by their fingertips to a little residual control over railway matters. Although I can understand that, it misses the point.

Mr. Spearing: Let me make our position absolutely clear. I would not want to claw back more powers over motorways, for example, although there were turnpike Acts many years ago. However, I want an hour and a half for debate on matters of local significance that may be very important. That is not time consuming—the rest may be done outside the House. Why not have an hour and a half?

Mr. Moate: The hon. Gentleman has missed the point. It is just as logical to apply that argument to roads. Exactly the same argument applies. If he wants to bring that matter back to Parliament, he should argue that case. He again suggested the dual procedure—a public inquiry system outside the House, with Parliament retaining a system of control thereafter, with much of the work having been done. That point was considered by the Select Committee. Nearly everybody who has been concerned with those matters is totally against having two bites at the cherry. A public inquiry system—analysis outside this place—would be very unsatisfactory if it were known that it would thereafter go to Parliament and all the work would be thrown away because our unsatisfactory system could simply reject it.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: New clause 1 does not mention that. It says that, if the inquiry reaches one decision and the Secretary of State comes up with a different decision, the House should be the arbitrator.

Mr. Moate: I understand what the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish says, but the hon. Member for Newham, South was not saying that—he was going a little further. I fundamentally disagree with the hon. Member for Newham, South. He is desperately trying to cling on to a Parliamentary procedure when, fundamentally, the

Select Committee and Parliament—I hope that it will continue—have endorsed the principle of moving such planning matters out into the planning system.

The hon. Gentleman is right—of course that means that Parliament is giving up that control, but it is doing so deliberately, because it knows that it is almost an accident of history that we have retained control over such matters. There are efficient systems which we still ultimately have to control matters and for which we ultimately have political responsibility, but they are outside the House and it makes sense to apply the same rules to railways and ports.

Of course it is a litle irritating when a Minister overrules the decisions of an inspector, but surely the same logic applies to a range of other public inquiries. If Parliament said, "Because, for historical reasons, we have had all those controls, we wish to retain residual control just over railways," why should we not have the same power over highways and all other planning matters? Whenever the Secretary of State overrules a local inspector, he will be saying that an order should be brought to the House and subject to the same negative procedure.

We must accept the argument in principle of passing those matters into the planning system. Therefore, I do not feel that the case for the new clause has been made out.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I refer to amendments Nos. 102 and 103. Of course we are not talking about an entirely unqualified procedure. Under clauses 1 and 3, which relate to the

"construction . . . of a transport system . . . or to matters ancillary to . . . the construction or use of an inland waterway",

the Secretary of State is given power to produce statutory instruments which are not subject to any procedure. My amendment simply requires that they should be subject to annulment. That is to say, if a prayer is tabled and the opportunity is provided, there should be a debate of one and a half hours—inadequate but better then nothing. For the information of the House, in 1991, of 114 prayers that wer tabled, 25 were debated. it is not as though we are talking about an overwhelming number of prayers being debated on the Floor of the House.

Clauses 1 and 3 provide the Secretary of State with power to make instruments, but only on application under rules provided under the negative procedure in clause 6. In Committee, we improved the Bill by making the negative procedure—that is, instruments subject to annulment—a requirement for the production of the rules. There is some element of public accountability, but, once the rules have been laid down, the Secretary of State can consider an application. Under clause 11, he may cause a public local inquiry to be held for the purposes of an application made under clause 6 under the rules made by a statutory instrument. However, it is not an absolute requirement that the Secretary of State holds a public local inquiry, because he may, if he thinks fit, appoint a person to hear an objection and then report to him.

5.30 pm

Of course, if the Secretary of State thinks that an application is frivolous or trivial, he can turn it down on those grounds. So he can turn it down on three different grounds. However, if a local authority applies, he must hold a local public inquiry. So there is a procedure. All that we ask in the new clause, as my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) says, is that Parliament should have reserve powers to examine an order if the Secretary of State differs from the decision or recommendation to hold a public inquiry.

What is the Minister's worry? If he makes an order after an application under clause 6, whether or not it is considered by a local public inquiry under clause 11, why should he not make an order with a negative procedure attached to it so that Members of Parliament have the opportunity to request a debate if they want one? There might be special local circumstances. There might be a difference of view between the local public inquiry and the Secretary of State. That would be one argument for having a debate. Another would be that a section of the local community was dissatisfied with some procedure of the inquiry. Local people might feel that their case had been denied a proper hearing. That might lead a Member of Parliament to table a prayer and seek a debate.

However, in our experience the likelihood is that a debate will not be sought. The likelihood is that one of the negative procedures will be used and the order will go through the House without objection. That would happen in the majority of cases. We simply want a reserve power to enable people outside the House to invoke the support of their Member of Parliament for a debate if they feel dissatisfied in some way.

Anxiety about a proposal might give rise to reluctance to allow the powers in the Bill to be used in such a way that they go unchallenged. The powers are pretty wide. Clause 5 states that an order under section 1 or 3 may

> "apply, modify or exclude any provision of an Act of Parliament (or of an instrument made under an Act of Parliament) which relates to any matter as to which an order could be made under section 1 or, as the case may be, 3, and
>
> (b) make such amendments, repeals and revocations as appear to the Secretary of State to be necessary".

Those wide powers are known as a Henry VIII clause. In effect we are giving power to the Minister to repeal or modify primary legislation made by the House of Commons and the House of Lords. That is an important power.

I am pleased that we are having this debate because over the years Parliament has given a power such as we are discussing to lots of Ministers lots of times. It has slid through the House with the greatest of ease. People are now examining such powers a little more closely. It is fair and proper that we should do so. As the powers are wide and involve criminal sanctions—penalties could be imposed on people under them—we should have a reserve power to have a look at things.

The Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments recently took evidence on an instrument presented to it. The evidence was not a bright, shining example of evidence submitted by a Department with clarity of thought. Indeed, the Department had clearly got things wrong in its memorandum. It apologised for that. After the evidence was given, we obtained from our counsel some comments about which Department was responsible for the most confusing and misleading instruments. I must tell the Minister that high on the list was the Department of Transport.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: It was the winner.

Mr. Cryer: As my hon. Friend says, it was the winner.

So we would be giving powers to issue orders to the Minister and his Department when the Department has not the best record for clarity of expression. That is

[Mr. Cryer]

important, because people have to use these orders. The orders are laws, we should attempt to make them as clear as possible.

I said in the Standing Committee, and it is worth repeating here, that the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments is not simply a policing body. It is an assisting body. If a Department approaches our counsel, who is an efficient and effective counsel, he will give advice if he finds faults in the instrument. An instrument can often be rectified before it is laid in the House. That is a useful service. If a Department does not have to go through any parliamentary procedure of annulment, of course it does not have to bother so much. It is important that the Department should have to bother.

It is not so much that we insist on having a one-and-a-half-hour debate,—but if that is at the back of people's minds, it helps them to concentrate on what is in hand. Under the orders, fines can be imposed, albeit not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale. People can be accused of a criminal offence. So it is not a bad idea for the Minister to accede to our request to make them subject to annulment and, therefore, to some examination outside the Department of Transport.

Schedule 1 lists matters within sections 1 and 3. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) referred to some such matters but I wish to draw the attention of the House to several other points. First, the orders can relate to

"The charging of tolls, fares (including penalty fares) and other charges, and the creation of summary offences in connection with non-payment (or in connection with a person's failure to give his name or address in accordance with provisions relating to penalty fares)."

So although a limited penalty is laid down in the body of the Bill, orders can cover a wide range of activities. Orders can also apply to sub-delegation. That is giving power to bodies not in Parliament, and other than Parliament, to make laws. Subdelegation comes under paragraph 13 of schedule 1 where it refers to:

"The making of byelaws by any person and their enforcement, including the creation of summary offences."

We are not dealing with draconian offences or penalties but none the less they are criminal offences for which people can be taken to a magistrates court. The magistrates would consider the case and pronounce sentence because summary offences had been created.

Whether we should give the Secretary of State powers to make orders is arguable, but it seems even more dubious to give the Secretary of State powers to give a third party powers to create penalties and summary offences. Schedule 1(18) states:

"The alteration of the powers of any body established by or under an Act of Parliament."

That impinges on primary legislation. The orders could change a body set up by an Act or the powers of such a body. To that degree the schedule curtails, alters, modifies and, indeed, extends legislation—an alteration could mean that the power of any body established by or under an Act of Parliament was extended.

I accept that, under the powers provided in clauses 1 to 3, an order is subject, before it is made, to a local public inquiry in most circumstances. But in some circumstances it will not be subject to an inquiry. Parliament should have a reserve power to assist the Department in drafting orders that are clear, without ambiguity and intra vires rather than ultra vires. That would be a help to the Department. The hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) said that we wanted to maintain control. He exaggerated the position. We do not seek control. We want to streamline the procedure. I am simply saying that Members' rights should not be eroded.

Perhaps in one in 100 cases—or not even that many—there may be a case of controversy, for example when railways are being considered or inland waters, which are being subject to rules of navigation. However, the areas covered in clauses 1 and 3—with the exception of the section of clause 3 which has been improved by making it subject to negative procedure—are not so likely to be free of controversy that we should exclude the 100th case when hon. Members may wish to raise the matter, on a prayer against an instrument, because they feel that it is wrong, is badly drafted or seeks to obtain powers not contained in the primary legislation that we are discussing. All those were problems mentioned in Committee and are realities.

The Minister has been helpful. In many other areas of the Bill the Minister recognised the strength of the argument that orders should be subject to negative procedure. As the powers contained in clause 1 and 3 are so extensive, they should also be included—in the way in which I have proposed—rather than excluded from further parliamentary procedure. That is not much to ask. It is not a question of holding on to centralised control but of saying that, as a last resort, because of errors, controversy or possible confrontation, Parliament should have the right to a mini-debate.

After all, it is not a bad idea to keep the spectre of a debate on a prayer before the Secretary of State. It ensures that he takes a closer look at the instrument. Instruments have been drafted—as the Minister knows—containing words and phrases that the Minister does not know about. The Minister has signed them. His civil servants did not know, and if he had asked them, they would have told him. The problem was that he did not ask them—and that was subject to negative procedure.

I am not asking much. This is a small request, and I hope that the Minister can meet it.

Mr. Snape: What the debate has lacked in numbers it has more than made up for in its quality. I have listened carefully to the four contributions and anyone who was impartial—none of us is—would have been swayed one way or the other listening to each speech in turn.

I shall consider the amendments in reverse order. The cricketing metaphor has already been used and my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) proposes a long-stop piece of legislation. I listened carefully to what he had to say and was fascinated by his view that the amendment would only be used, if it became part of the Bill, in about one in every 100 cases.

I am not sure whether I can go along with that figure. I have known my hon. Friend for many years. A short time after he and I first entered the House he introduced me to some of the more bewildering complexities of orders and praying against them. After a comparatively short time here, he demonstrated a labyrinthine knowledge of some of those procedures.

Knowing my hon. Friend and his diligence, I suspect that, if we accepted his amendment, he would use each and every opportunity to have a debate—I do not blame him for that—although he tells us that that would arise only in one in every 100 cases.

Occasionally such matters can lead to competition between hon. Members—sometimes between hon. Members on the same side of the House. Having set that precedent, with the great knowledge which I know that he possesses, one could envisage that other hon. Members would also use the procedure. Far from being one in 100 cases, it would become accepted custom and practice.

Although I admired the way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South pushed his amendment, if we accepted it, the loophole that it would open would soon widen into a window of opportunity and, given the amount of use that it would get, the wall on that side of the building would fall down.

Mr. Cryer: I think that my hon. Friend has attributed to me more of a spirit of inquiry than I justify. In 1991, about 1,750 instruments were laid before the House and a tiny proportion—perhaps 200—were under the affirmative procedure, but there were only 100 prayers from 650 Members of Parliament. I tabled only a handful. Based on that experience, my original claim that about one in 100 would be dealt with through that procedure is right.

Mr. Snape: My hon. Friend does not care to tell us what percentage of the 100 he tabled. I guess that it was more than one.

Mr. Cryer: That is quite right—it was more than one.

5.45 pm

Mr. Snape: If he tabled more than one, it has blown a hole in his argument that it will only be one in 100. He knows full well that all too often such matters generate controversy when other proposed work does not.

I invite the House to look at today's Order Paper, which contains a considerable number of such Bills. Most of them would be covered by the proposals in this legislation and many of them prayed against. I do not single out one and I am sure that the names of those of my hon. Friends which appear on the blocking motions appear there because those hon. Members are concerned about the scheme involved.

Let us take as an example a non-railway Bill. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), who represents a large part of my home town of Stockport, has a deep and abiding interest in the Alliance and Leicester (Girobank) Bill, and that is why his name appears on the blocking motion. The fact that our procedures allow so many railway Bills to be blocked at present does not fill me with confidence that the acceptance of some of these amendments would speed up our procedures.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: I remind my hon. Friend that, soon after I entered the House in 1974, he told me of the brilliant Select Committee on Statutory Instruments, on which he served, and suggested that I might like to take his place on it. I have served on it ever since. The ability to question statutory instruments does not mean that they always have to be questioned, just as the ability to table a blocking motion does not mean that legislation always has to be debated. It may well mean that the promoters will want to talk and to give assurances—just as, if one tables a prayer against an order and starts to make a fuss about having a debate on it, Ministers are sometimes prepared to be helpful to Members to avoid a debate. It is not necessarily a question of having a debate, but prayers allow Members to apply pressure.

Mr. Snape: There was no doubt that I was wise to give up my place on the Statutory Instruments Select Committee to my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish. It has allowed him to display the remarkable expertise that he and my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South display with great regularity in the House. The fact that I so willingly relinquished my position on that Committee to him explains why he can run rings around me and many other hon. Members when it comes to procedural matters.

While accepting everything that he has just said about the importance of getting Ministers in any Government to reconsider proposals—especially when, in the opinion of the hon. Member concerned, they might adversely affect the interests of his or her constituents—we are talking about finding some method of dealing with certain legislation.

As the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) rightly pointed out, railway legislation regularly comes before the House only as an accident of history. Uniquely, railway matters—even supposedly less controversial railway matters—have to come before the House. I am told that the purpose of the legislation—or at least the Government said it was——

Mr. Spearing: Ah!

Mr. Snape: I shall reply to my hon. Friend's scepticism in a moment.

I am told that the legislation was intended to put different modes of transport on an equal footing. I know that that philosophy unites all Labour Members. Many of us have long felt that the railway industry has been unduly penalised because of those procedures. Delays have been regularly inflicted upon railway projects because of the time that they take to clear the hurdles of the House.

The amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), is not a long-stop amendment, to continue the cricketing parlance. He has moved all the fielders to one place and they are all lining up. If the first seven miss the ball, there are still a few more behind them to stop it. I do not see any purpose to the Bill, if each and every case comes back to the House in the way that my hon. Friend outlined. I am more attracted to new clause 1, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish, whereby, should the Secretary of State overrule the results of an inquiry, an order will be subject to annulment by resolution of either House of Parliament. Again, although I see the merit in that, it would outweigh some of the advantages gained from transferring legislation on railways from the House to inquiries at a local level.

Mr. Spearing: My hon. Friend passed rapidly over my amendment. However, does he agree that its advantage would be that, instead of debating a controversial Bill for up to six hours on Second Reading and spending four or more weeks in Committee, which would engage many hon. Members in long hours, we could have a debate of an hour and a half only on the Floor of the House? Surely, from my hon. Friend's point of view, that would be a great advantage.

Mr. Snape: No, it would not. The purpose of the Bill is to take many of those matters from the House and to put them where many of us believe they should be discussed —at a local inquiry. My hon. Friend's amendment would bring them all back again.

Mr. Spearing: No, it would not.

Mr. Snape: My hon. Friend says no, but he knows that it would, because—I say this with utmost respect—he is one of the most artful users of the rules of this House. He is as artful as my hon. Friends the Members for Denton and Reddish and for Bradford, South.

The discussion of procedures relating to railway legislation should be transferred to where I believe it properly belongs—inquiries at local level. Therefore, the amendments and the new clause should be resisted.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am not sure whether I should intrude on the private grief of the Opposition.

In Committee, we had many interesting debates on how to go forward most effectively. I wish to take the opportunity to thank the hon. Members for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and the Opposition Front-Bench team for their constructive approach. I also extend my thanks to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn). This is an important Bill and we are making numerous changes. I hope that the constructive approach that we took in Committee allayed some of the fears of hon. Members.

I cannot recommend the amendments and new clause 1 to the House. New clause 1 would mean that every order made under clause 1 or clause 3 where the Secretary of State had modified the inquiry inspector's recommendation would have to be laid before Parliament, however small the modification, and even if the modification had been the subject of a further inquiry. That would introduce an added—and I would suggest unwelcome—procedure into the decision-making process for railway and tramway schemes which does not apply to highways projects or to general planning applications. That was the point raised by the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape). It would introduce further delay and uncertainty into a procedure which railway and tramway promoters —and indeed some Labour Members—already regard as potentially very protracted.

Amendment No. 66 was tabled by all the Labour hon. Members who have spoken in the debate. It refers to "unreasonable delay", but I shall explain why I think that it would add to that delay.

I know that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish has in mind, in particular, schemes of national significance where, following an inquiry, the inspector recommended major changes which, if accepted, would conflict with the terms of the parliamentary approval. I agree that, as clause 9 is currently drafted, the Secretary of State might be tempted to reject the inspector's recommended changes, but I think that amendment No. 86, tabled by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, provides a more satisfactory and practicable solution to that point. However, the new clause would affect all orders—not just those of national significance.

Decisions on transport developments are seldom clear-cut. Judgments have to be made which weigh, on the one hand, the impact of the scheme on people and the environment at the local level and, on the other, the wider public benefits which the scheme might bring. The inspector, having heard all the evidence at an inquiry, will have a view and will reflect this in his recommendation. In cases where the arguments for and against the development are finely balanced, the inspector might, in his report, recommend that the scheme should proceed subject to certain conditions and modifications. Equally, he might recommend rejection, but in terms which would provide a basis for the Secretary of State to reach a different view if he concluded that more weighting should be given to the wider public good.

Under the proposed new clause, if the Secretary of State decides to turn down the order, perhaps against the recommendation of the inspector, Parliament would be able to do nothing about it. On the other hand, if he makes the order but in so doing rejects, say, certain conditions recommended by the inspector or imposes others, the order would have to be laid before Parliament. Consequently, the effect of the new clause would be to upset the careful balance we have sought to achieve between the interests of promoters and of objectors in favour of the latter.

As I have said, the new clause would introduce further delay—as much as five months in certain circumstances —and uncertainty. If an order were successfully prayed against in either House, it would be lost. The applicant would then have to start the process all over again because the Secretary of State would not be able to modify an order that he had already made. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish might say that this would be unlikely to arise, but I cannot see what purpose the parliamentary scrutiny would serve if it did not provide the opportunity to change the Secretary of State's decision.

I remind the House that the Secretary of State is required under clause 14(2) to give reasons for his decision on an order. The inspector's report would be published when the order is made, so the Secretary of State would be bound to say why he had departed from the inspector's recommendation. Moreover, his decision would be open to challenge in the courts.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South asked whether the level of fines should be extended. He is an expert in such matters and I am sure that he is already aware that hundreds of byelaws that create criminal offences are made by the Government and local authorities which are not subject to parliamentary supervision. I do not believe that we are talking about a great extension of such powers.

Mr. Cryer: Under the provisions of paragraph 12 of schedule 1, some delegation of powers is allowed to virtually any body that is not democratically elected. We are democratically elected—we are soon to be embroiled in an election—and so are local authorities. I understand why local authorities have such delegated powers, and rightly so, but at least there is an element of accountability. That is why I am concerned about paragraph 12.

Mr. McLoughlin: A balance must be struck, and I believe that the orders would have an important effect.

This has been a good debate, but I cannot accept the new clause and the amendments. I ask the House to reject them.

6 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: I am a little disappointed by what the Minister says. Although he gave us a fair number of concessions in Committee. I hoped that he would have picked one of our amendments to give us a little more parliamentary control.

I am conscious of the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), who served on the Committee, does not want us to rush to a vote at this moment, but I want to explain to the Government that we are still not totally happy with the question of parliamentary control. Perhaps in the other place their lordships may feel that they should try to insist on the rights not only of this House but of the House of Lords.

Although my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) suggested that a general election is imminent, I hope that the Bill will get through before that happens. I realise that the schedule will be tight if the House of Lords is to come up with amendments, but it is important that it considers the questions of parliamentary scrutiny and where Ministers make different decisions from those of the Secretary of State.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend said that he was not anxious to press the matter to a vote. I think that we should divide on the new clause, because the Minister would unfortunately not even accept my more moderate suggestion that any instrument should be subject to negative procedure. It is therefore important that my hon. Friend should consider the need for a gesture, in the form of a vote, to show that some of us are unhappy that some parliamentary accountability is not being retained in the clause.

Mr. Bennett: I assure my hon. Friend that I am working in that direction. It is a little ironic that many of our colleagues are at this moment meeting the parliamentary Labour party to consider next week's business, and I suspect that some Conservative Members are in a meeting of the 1922 Committee. It will not be particularly popular with hon. Members in either of those meetings if their proceedings are interrupted by a Division on the Floor of the House. It may be to their convenience, therefore, if I say a few more words on the matter before I press it to a vote. The slight irony of the matter is that, when dealing with private Bills, I must often speak from these Benches at considerable length to delay the procedure.

Mr. McLoughlin: I understand how the hon. Gentleman is trying to facilitate the business of the House. However, may I draw his attention to the fact that, if the Secretary of State were to make different kinds of orders, he would be required under clause 14(2) to give the reasons for his decision. The inspector's report would obviously be published once the order was made and the Secretary of State would be bound to say why he had departed from the inspector's recommendations. His decision would then be challengeable.

As for the idea that we are somehow taking the issue out of the domain of Parliament, the hon. Members for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) do not need me to explain to them how they can bring matters to the attention of the House, hold up business and make their views well known. Moreover, I am sure that they are capable of advising any other hon. Member about that.

Mr. Bennett: The Minister used that argument in Committee. There are all sorts of techniques that hon. Members can use to draw attention to problems. Yesterday, when we heard the Secretary of State for the Environment speaking, one or two of us wondered whether the Mace would be removed.

Mr. Cryer: He was on Ecstasy.

Mr. Bennett: Although perfectly legitimate devices for drawing attention to grievances or problems exist, there are advantages in following rules and regulations that encourage and facilitate debates, rather than having to look for ways of breaking rules and regulations to draw attention to a problem. We are asking the Minister to give us a natural channel of rules and regulations to work through, rather than having to look for extra-parliamentary activities.

I could cry, "I spy strangers," at this point and create a vote. If that is done in the middle of Prime Minister's Question Time, it attracts more publicity to an issue than many hours of debate in a statutory instruments committee. I understand that there are plenty of ways to draw attention to a problem, but let us try to do it properly.

An even more worrying remark that the Minister made was that the Government were taking matters away from Parliament and giving them to local inquiries. A Minister would then have the power to override a local inquiry. He then said that, if that Minister did not do his work properly, the power would be given to the courts. I resent the idea that Parliament—the high court of the land—should hand over decisions to the judiciary. I do not wish to spin out the debate, even for a minute or two, discussing the merits of our judges, but I have more trust in most Tory Ministers than I have in most judges.

Mr. McLoughlin: I know about that concern, because it was raised by the hon. Member for Bradford——

Mr. Cryer: South.

Mr. McLoughlin: I shall get it right by the end of the night.

I agree that that would be the last recourse that any hon. Member would take, but any Minister considering changing the order would bear that in mind. The responsibility would not stop at the Minister, because he would be challengeable elsewhere.

Mr. Bennett: I thank the Minister for that information. However, to send a marker to the House of Lords, it is important that we divide on one group of amendments, and it would be far simpler to divide on new clause 1. The House of Lords may prefer to return to one of the other amendments, but I hope that it will pursue the Government on that.

Mr. Monte: Will the hon. Gentleman deal with the specific point that I tried to address to him? Does he concede that a road inquiry can be just as controversial —probably more so because there are more of them—than a railway inquiry? If the new clause argues that a negative procedure of the House should apply to any situation where a Minister changes or overrules an inspector's decision, why does not the hon. Gentleman apply exactly the same argument to highways, for instance?

Mr. Bennett: I would second that as a proposal if the hon. Gentleman would care to table it as an amendment. Most highway orders are done by statutory instrument so it would be merely a question of making statutory instruments for highway matters subject to negative procedure, where there is a difference between what the inspector recommends and what the Secretary of State intends to do. The occasions when the Secretary of State decides to modify an order are rare and there is a strong reason for insisting that this decision should be accountable to Parliament.

Mr. Spearing: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a great distinction between the compulsory purchase of highways, buildings or plant and the creation of a transport system, where power as well as property are involved, and where the making of law as distinct from the purchasing of property is a great feature? Moreover, much of the legal infrastructure for policing and control already exists with regard to highways, whereas in any transport system it must be specific.

Mr. Bennett: Yes, I accept that.

I hope that the two meetings to which I referred are now over and that we can divide on the new clause.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 41, Noes 173.

Division No. 89] **[6.08 pm**

AYES

Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Bellotti, David
Benton, Joseph
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carr, Michael
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Corbett, Robin
Cox, Tom
Dalyell, Tam
Dixon, Don
Fearn, Ronald
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Fyfe, Maria
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Howells, Geraint
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
McFall, John
Madden, Max
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Meale, Alan
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Nellist, Dave
Rooney, Terence
Salmond, Alex
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Spearing, Nigel
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Vaz, Keith
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan

Tellers for the Ayes
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Andrew F. Bennett.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'l's)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dunn, Bob
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knox, David
Lawrence, Ivan
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Warren, Kenneth
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 3

— LOCAL ORDER-MAKING POWER

'.—( )-(1) This section applies where an application made under section 6 above relates to proposals which in the opinion of the Secretary of State are minor and of only local significance.

(2) Subject to the following provisions of this section, the Secretary of State may determine that an application which is in his opinion minor and of only local significance shall be handled by the local planning authority for the area to which the proposal relates.

(3) The Secretary of State shall make rules as to the way in which a local planning authority shall determine such applications, including—

(a) arrangements for seeking views on the application;
(b) the consideration of objections to the proposals; and
(c) the handling of appeals against a decision of the local planning authority.

(4) The Secretary of State shall publish a guidance note setting out the factors he will take into account in determining whether proposals subject to applications under section 6 above minor and of only local significance.'.—*[Mr. Snape.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Snape: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The clause seeks to introduce into the Bill a means by which minor schemes of only local significance can be determined locally. The Bill does not include a local order-making power as floated in the Government's original consultation document. That is of considerable concern to organisations such as the Association of Metropolitan Authorities whose members are at the forefront of the revival in interest in light railway schemes. The subject received cursory attention in Committee and I raise it to press the Government to reconsider.

The consultation paper on which the Bill's provisions are based said that the Government saw advantage in a three-tier approach

"with some proposals being considered and approved locally, others by Ministers and a small minority being referred to Parliament".

The Bill provides only for a two-tier approach, the local tier having disappeared. On the local tier, the consultation paper stated:

"If some proposals of essentially local significance can be authorised by local planning authorities there are likely to be some time savings. In practice many local and minor schemes may have to come to central government for approval, either because they involve compulsory land acquisition . . . or because the works require scheduled monument consent. It will be for Parliament to decide whether or not to give local authorities powers to confer a defence on grounds of statutory authority to actions for nuisance which will be involved in many of the proposals at present authorised by private bill. Nevertheless the Government would welcome views, particularly from the local authority associations, about what local decision-making may be practicable."

What representations were received from local authority associations and why have they apparently been discarded?

The Association of Metropolitan Authorities strongly supported the local-tier proposal, as did other local authority associations. They argued that it would be especially useful in relation to small modifications to previously approved schemes which frequently arise as a result of detailed design work and implementation following initial scheme approval.

On Second Reading, the Minister said that the Government had examined the scope for a separate regime for schemes

"so local in impact that they should be dealt with by local authorities. On examining the matter further, we have found them to be too few to warrant the legislative apparatus, including possible appeals, which would be required."—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1991; Vol. 200, c. 44.]

We are not able to quantify the demand for that type of procedure, but we are advised that minor modifications to schemes are not infrequent and that under the proposed arrangements they would be subject to the full blown order-making procedure. It is certain that as further major public transport schemes are proposed and implemented, the number of such minor proposals will increase. In Committee, the Minister said:

"Several points were put to us—not least by the Council on Tribunals—as a result of our consultations and we felt that it was best to keep one type of scheme in operation for all the orders"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 23 January 1992; c. 373.]

The Minister's officials have been a little more forthcoming. In correspondence with the AMA they raised a number of objections to the local tier of decision making. In a letter to the association, the Department stated:

"an important feature of all statutory authorised works is that they benefit from a common law defence of statutory authority against actions for nuisance arising from the proper operation of the undertaking. We had doubts about the propriety of delegating to local authorities the power (traditionally in the gift of Parliament of Ministers of the Crown) to confer such a privilege."

When stripped of the jargon so beloved of departmental civil servants, that means that they do not trust anybody but themselves to take decisions. It is important to remember that the consultation paper says that that issue should be decided by Parliament, but it looks as though it has been prejudged by the Under-Secretary and his fellow Ministers.

The Department of Transport also argued in writing to the Association of Metropolitan Authorities that it

"foresaw problems with defining what constitutes a local scheme."

That is the opposite of what the Minister said in Committee during discussions about similar matters. I shall paraphrase what he said, and I took him to mean that it was easy to define a local from a national scheme. If he did say that, perhaps he could persuade some of his advisers that that is the case, because they appear to think that the opposite is true. The definition of what constitutes a local scheme applies equally to the definition of schemes of national significance for the purposes of clause 9.

Mr. McLoughlin: I think that the hon. Gentleman is mixing different parts of what was said in Committee. His paraphrase of what I said is almost correct, and I shall not argue about the small details on which he is wrong. I said that schemes of national significance which were subject to the special parliamentary procedures that were laid down would be easily identifiable. I shall later deal with the problems in the new clause.

Mr. Snape: I probably did not paraphrase the Minister in as elegant a way as he delivered the original words. I thought that he said that national schemes were easy to quantify. Perhaps I read too much into what he said. I presumed that, if he could obviously identify national schemes, it would be fairly easy to say that the rest were local schemes. I have no doubt that the Minister will deal with that in his reply.

The absence from the Bill of a local tier is especially disturbing in the light of what the Minister said about a possible alternative route. Speaking to another clause to which the same principle applies, the Minister said:

"Clause 24 gives power to the Secretary of State to transfer certain classes of case to inspectors on the model of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 if experience shows that to be the best way of dealing with them."—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1991; Vol. 200, c. 44.]

[Mr. Snape]

The phrase "if experience shows" should cause us some concern. There can be no doubt of the existence of this group of minor modifications which require authorisation. For how long will they have to go through those expensive and time-consuming authorisation procedures before the Government introduce a streamlined and preferably locally based alternative route? If the Government cannot see the sense of the new clause, the use of clause 24 would become extremely important, and clarification of the Government's position on that clause is vital.

Also important in the context of the debate is clause 6(4) which allows the Secretary of State to set different rules for applications for different types of scheme. If the Minister continues to resist the case for including in the Bill a local order-making power, will he agree to use the power in clause 6(4) to streamline the process for minor schemes?

The adoption of the provisions in the new clause will not only clarify this part of the Bill but make local order-making power easier and more democratic.

Mr. McLoughlin: As the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) says, in some ways the new clause replicates one which we discussed, albeit briefly, in Committee. If my memory serves me right, "briefly" means that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) rose and said, "Why not?" and expected an answer.

I accept that the consultation proposals contained the suggestion that local authorities should be able to decide on applications for orders which were minor and local in nature. I shall explain why we decided to drop that suggestion. We thought that there might be advantages to be gained in terms of time scale by deciding some applications locally. There was some support for the proposal from the local authority associations, but none of their responses identified any obvious or sizeable group of schemes suitable for treatment in this way which we thought would have justified the creation of a separate procedure.

Other responses to the consultation document, such as that from the Council on Tribunals, highlighted serious deficiencies in the proposal, and I fear that the same considerations apply to new clause 3. Our first difficulty was in deciding how to identify which schemes should be treated under a local procedure. Many small schemes might appear, initially, to be of only local significance because of their size. That factor alone would not, however, take into account the possibility that their environmental or economic effects could extend much more widely than the immediate vicinity of the works.

6.30 pm

Some schemes that are definitely minor and local may nevertheless cross local authority boundaries. These would be difficult to handle at local authority level and would probably require us to provide potentially complex procedural arrangements. There would be other handling problems for schemes—of which there could be many—which were promoted by local authorities themselves in their own area. In such cases, there would be understandable concern at the prospect of lcoal authorities applying to themselves for statutory authorisation for works, and we would certainly have to provide procedures for appeals to the Secretary of State and for the calling in of schemes by him.

Many, if not most, orders under the new procedure will be likely to include proposals for the compulsory acquisition of land. It would be contrary to long-established policy for such matters to be decided other than by Parliament or Ministers of the Crown. There are similar doubts in some quarters about the propriety of allowing local authorities to confer statutory authority for works. Such authority carries with it a defence against actions for nuisance arising from the proper operation of an undertaking, and this will be a factor in most applications for railway and tramway orders.

Finally, we thought that the need to provide a mechanism for appeals to the Secretary of State against decisions by local authorities would remove any potential time benefits of local decision making. That would defeat the main purpose of setting up the procedure in the first place.

I should also take this opportunity to anticipate the amendments that we are proposing—Nos. 32 to 34—to clause 23 which takes a different approach to local schemes from new clause 3. I undertook in Committee to look again at the scope of the power to transfer classes of application to inspectors; our revised proposal is to exclude from the scope of clause 23 those applications which involve compulsory acquisition powers. I hope that Opposition Members will agree that clause 23 offers a more practical way of dealing with local schemes, and will agree to withdraw the new clause.

Mr. Snape: Although I understand the Minister's reluctance to commit himself in the way outlined in the new clause, I find some parts of his explanation less than satisfactory. It is all very well to say that it is hard to define the schemes that should be treated as local; I should have thought that an element of common sense was required here. Obviously, if schemes cross local authority boundaries, they cannot be readily defined as local.

Some of the minor matters that are currently dealt with by means of the fairly cumbersome procedures of the House—and, in future, will be dealt with by means of the procedures proposed in the Bill, which appear to be equally cumbersome—really ought to be looked at again. We shall consult our noble Friends in another place about whether we should return to that point.

Surely it would be possible for Ministers to give local authorities delegated powers to deal with statutory agencies. Local authorities frequently act as agents for Her Majesty's Government when it comes to motorway works and repairs. Is there really any difference between that and delegating powers under the Bill?

As I have said, this aspect of the Bill will be considered again in another place, because we feel that more local democracy is necessary. The further down the democratic pipeline some of these decisions are made, the better. Having listened to the Minister' explanation, however, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1

ORDERS AS TO RAILWAYS, TRAMWAYS ETC

Mr. Snape: I beg to move amendment No. 65, in page 1, line 17, at end insert—

'(3) In exercising his power under this section the Secretary of State shall have no regard to the exercise of any power he may have to make any grant towards the cost of the construction or operation of the transport system proposed.'.

The amendment requires the Secretary of State not to have regard to any of his grant-making responsibilities when determining an order submitted to him under the provisions of part I. It is designed to secure assurances from Ministers on that important point.

Local authorities with an interest in promoting, for example, light rail schemes broadly support part I, but there is some concern about the fact that the Secretary of State for Transport will be responsible both for authorising such schemes and for considering whether to grant-aid them. The authorities involved are keen to ensure that there is a clear distinction between the Secretary of State's two roles. Decisions on whether to make an order should relate to the need for the proposal in terms of transport policy, its implications for land use policies and other environmental effects. An order should not be rejected because the Secretary of State is not in a position to provide grant for it or because he fears that it may not meet the grant criteria that he has laid down.

I do not think that it is the role of the Department of Transport to try to second-guess—or, in the case of some schemes, to first-guess or out-guess—the Treasury. After all, as someone far more eminent than I recently said, as the best brains of the nation are collected together in Whitehall in order to say no to every public-sector scheme put to them, the Department of Transport ought to allow them to do just that, rather than saying no on their behalf for reasons other than those outlined in the amendment. Confirmation that the Secretary of State will distinguish between the two functions is, in our view, vital.

Authorities' concerns have been exacerbated by the proposal in the draft applications and objections procedure rules circulated recently by the Department of Transport that an application for an order should be accompanied by

"an estimate (with breakdown of items) of the cost of implementing the proposed order".

Confirmation that the information on costs requested with an application will be no greater than that required under the current private Bill procedures would also be helpful.

Mr. McLoughlin: Again, the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) has made his point well and, in normal circumstances, we agree with the course that he urges on us. That is why, in paragraph 21 of the consultation document "Private Bills and New Procedures", we said:

"There will be cases where promoters of orders (eg to authorise light rapid transit systems) will also be applying to the Secretary of State for Transport for a grant towards the costs of their scheme. The Government recognises that the dual functions of deciding whether or not to make the order and whether or not to give grant or to approve investment will need to be kept separate. The Secretary of State will decide the case for statutory authorisation and the case for financial support independently and on their own merits."

I do not believe that there could be a clearer statement of the policy. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, it goes further than grant, which his amendment mentions, although grants under section 56 of the Transport Act 1968 will be important in this context. The operator might also need loan sanction of some kind, or credit approval. That, too, ought to be kept apart from the consideration of the planning merits—in its widest sense—of the order. It is one reason why, in clause 20, we remove the need for BR and LRT to obtain consent before depositing an order, as they must for a Bill. That requirement never applied to local authorities or to passenger transport executives.

That does not mean, however, that I support the amendment. It is undesirable and unnecessary. It is undesirable because it could be unfair to those adversely affected and to other objectors. If the Secretary of State receives an application for an order and the promoter has no hope of financing the work for the foreseeable future, should the Secretary of State really have no regard to that, even if he has a power to grant-aid the works? His proper course must surely be to turn the applicant away, so as not to inconvenience grossly those whose property and lives would be affected.

The hon. Gentleman, no doubt, is thinking of local authorities, and I am sure that we would all agree that we hope that they would not do such a thing. Would he think the same about private bodies? They, too, are eligible under section 56 for grants. I might add—to forestall the request for an example—that my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) put one before us a little while ago.

The amendment is unnecessary because, in making decisions on these orders, the Secretary of State must have regard only to the evidence presented at the inquiry, if there is one, or to the written representations, if there is not. He must not take account of what he might do about grant or loans or any other extraneous matter. If he were to do that, he could be challenged in the courts, either by the applicant or by the objectors. He must have good reasons for his decisions on orders, and they must be made public. So there is ample opportunity to check that decisions have been made for proper reasons.

Mr. Snape: If that is the case, why, in the draft procedure rules recently circulated by the Department, is there provision for

"an estimate (with breakdown of items) of the cost of implementing the proposed order"?

The Minister will forgive me for being somewhat suspicious if I feel that price has at least as large a part to play in the Secretary of State's decision-making process as necessity.

Mr. Moate: I have been listening with interest to this exchange. I wonder whether my hon. Friend might also respond to some concern that is felt on this side of the House. I see the difficulty involved in legislating, but my hon. Friend's answer seems to suggest that a Secretary of State could build Chinese walls within himself. On the one hand, he would have to make a quasi-judicial decision; on the other hand, he could be the banker. My hon. Friend has said that there is no problem. Is he saying quite clearly that if, for financial reasons, the evidence of the inquiry were disregarded, the decision could be challenged in court? Is that the point that he is making? If so, the Chinese wall that we like to think might exist will be reinforced.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am not using the trick that I understand my noble Friend Lord

[Mr. McLoughlin]

Whitelaw used when he was thinking about the answer to a question—the device of coughing and spluttering, and stopping the interview until he got a message. I shall have no trouble in responding in due course. The trouble about the notes that one receives from one's officials is that one cannot read them. Obviously the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East wishes to make a point, as does my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate).

Mr. Snape: Perhaps I should intervene again to enable the Minister to look a little more carefully at his official's note. For all I know, it may well say that the amendment is not only eminently sensible but also acceptable. If it does say so, will the Minister put us out of our misery?

Mr. McLoughlin: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the note does not say that.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman appreciates the fact that we circulated the draft rules. He has rightly said that they are draft rules. Obviously representations will be made in respect of some of the points that he has raised, and in the light of them amendments may be made. But cost is an important point, as the hon. Gentleman must recognise. Surely he would not want to encourage a local authority to come forward with a scheme that might cause great inconvenience to local people if the authority had no way of funding that scheme. The blight that might be caused is also a serious concern to local residents. We have all seen how damaging blight, or the possibility of blight, can be.

Let me come now to the matter of the public inquiry. Let us imagine that the objectors question the economic viability of the scheme and successfully demonstrate that there could be no public benefit from construction, that the cost-benefit ratio was so awful that even the hon. Gentleman might not grant-aid it. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that money will be free-flowing; nor do I think that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) suggests that money will be free-flowing, whatever the circumstances.

Given the other claims for finance that are likely to be faced, would it be right to amend the Bill so that the Secretary of State would have to have no regard to their evidence, even though the objectors, including environmental groups, had shown that the economic case for the scheme was so weak that grant could never be justified? I think not, as I imagine Opposition Members probably think not, because the environmental damage done by the scheme could not be justified as against the public benefit from it. Apart from that, such a provision would mean that the effect of blight would be extended until the grant application had been rejected and the scheme failed as a consequence.

Let me sum up. First, to achieve what he wants to achieve, the hon. Gentleman should have gone further. Secondly, we have every intention, in normal cases, to keep separate whether a scheme has planning merit and whether it should be grant-aided and, if so, when. Thirdly, if the Secretary of State takes into account improperly the way in which he might use his grant powers when making a decision on an order, he will be subject to judicial review. The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) is not here, but I should say that I am aware of his point about the last stop. Obviously the last stop is considered carefully by the Secretary of State when these points are put forward.

This amendment is far too rigid and would lead to inquiries and decision which, for the reasons that I have given, could prejudice many ordinary people and environmental groups. I hope that the Opposition will feel able to withdraw it.

6.45 pm

Mr. Snape: I am a little taken aback. First, the Minister tells me how sensible my amendment is; then he berates me for having the temerity to move it in the first place. I must warn him that, after the election, he had better destroy the missive that he somewhat belatedly received. Otherwise, if this is the kind of reaction that we are to expect, we might check the handwriting and take appropriate action.

I understand only too well the financial implications of some of these schemes. All that my amendment proposes is that those implications should not be the reason for rejection of schemes within the Department. All too often the suspicion is that that is just how things are done. If there is one great thing wrong with the planning procedures, especially in respect of public works in this country, it is that all too often the money is decided first and the scheme tailored accordingly. I am merely trying to prevent the Minister, in his few remaining weeks in office, from falling any further into those bad habits.

However, having said, as we did earlier, that we are prepared to accept any crumbs that we can get—if not from the rich man's table, then from the Minister's—I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 2

EXTENSION OF SECTION 1 TO OTHER GUIDED TRANSPORT SYSTEMS

Mr. McLoughlin: I beg to move amendment No. 18, in page 1, line 21, leave out from 'instrument' to 'House' in line 22 and insert

'; but no order shall be made unless a draft of it has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this it will be convenient to take Government amendment No. 19.

Mr. McLoughlin: These two amendments fulfil an undertaking that I gave in Committee to provide what at least the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) will regard as a better form of parliamentary scrutiny of ministerial orders that prescribe modes of guided transport and descriptions of works which interfere with rights of navigation and therefore extend the scope of the order-making powers under clauses 1 and 3.

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): It is always nice to get to the stage of having secured some concessions from the Government. We are grateful for those.

There is one aspect on which I should like to press the Minister further, relating to Government amendment No. 19. Why does not the amendment apply to the whole of clause 3? Clearly it is important that we have the

affirmative resolution procedure. Perhaps I should try to string out my comments so that the relevant message, in the relevant handwriting, can reach the Minister.

As things stand, I do not know whether the Minister has been generous in respect of amendment No. 19, or whether he is trying to give the impression that it relates to all the concerns that we expressed in Committee. What worries me is that what he has come up with, in the shape of amendment No. 19, relates only to such things as tidal barrages, and not to the wider issues of canals and rivers. How generous is the Minister actually being? Why do these amendments not go further? Why do they not extend to the whole of clause 3? Can the Minister, either at this stage or at some later stage, give us some assurance about this matter?

Mr. McLoughlin: The amendment certainly fulfils the commitment that we gave in Committee. I think that I pointed out in Committee the difficulties that we would have in extending this all the way along the line, and that there was not the need. We shall come at a later stage to some of the points about waterways that the hon. Lady may want to talk about.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 3

ORDERS AS TO INLAND WATERWAYS, ETC.

Mr. McLoughlin: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 2, line 3, leave out 'use' and insert 'operation'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider the following: Amendment No. 54, in page 2, line 15, at end insert—

'(4) The reference in subsection (1)(b)(i) above to rights of navigation in waters does not include any right to use or keep any vessel on those waters.'.

Government amendment No. 53.

Mr. McLoughlin: Somewhat unusually, I find myself in the position of moving an amendment with the support of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). I am almost sure that he ought to be moving the amendment, because I added my name to the amendment after he had tabled it.

As members of the Committee already know, I have listened carefully to the advice of those who represent users of inland waterways. We have been grateful for their constructive comments, and have agreed that some adjustments to the Bill, like this one, are desirable. The effect of changing the term "use" to "operation" will make for consistency between the clause 3 and the clause 1 order-making power. It will also reassure the users of waterways that the essential purpose of the Bill is for orders to deal with the construction and management of works rather than their abandonment or redevelopment. I am sure that the House will support amendment No. 1 and the consequential amendment to the long title in amendment No. 53.

I understand that amendment No. 54 reflects the concerns of the Inland Waterways Association to protect the position of houseboat owners in certain waters. The association has noted that the parliamentary orders under the Transport Act 1968, which we propose to preserve under amendment No. 24, include the power to interfere with the right to keep a vessel or craft on a canal or inland waterway. The IWA's argument is that ministerial orders under clause 3(1)(b), which deal with matters outside inland waterways, should not have that power because they are not subject to parliamentary approval.

I cannot accept that it would be reasonable to fetter the Secretary of State's powers as the amendment proposes. Currently, if a Transport Act order is not required, the arrangements for houseboat owners in a works scheme can be made under a private Bill, and there is no reason why a future order under this Bill should not be allowed to make similar arrangements. The position of moorings may be crucial to a particular works scheme under clause 3(1)(b), but it would be for the promoter to convince the Secretary of State and any local inquiry that his proposals were justified. The objections of local boat owners would have to be taken into account, along with the provisions of any existing local enactments and local mooring contracts. Compensation would be available to anyone who had proper rights to moor.

My officials have discussed amendment No. 54 with representatives of the IWA and the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council. I hope that, in view of its impracticality, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish will agree not to press it.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: I am grateful to the Minister for adding his name to amendment No. 1. It will go some way towards reassuring canal users. However, some of them feel that a move is afoot to increase mooring charges. If some of the moorings that are lost are cheap moorings, people may be forced to pay substantially more for new moorings. I realise that this issue overlaps issues that are dealt with in the private Bill which, I believe, is still in the other place. When the Minister replies to the debate, I hope that he will make it clear that this clause is not intended to be used as a reason for increasing mooring charges on canals.

Ms. Walley: It is strange for an amendment to be tabled not just in the name of the Secretary of State for Transport but also in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). It shows that genuine concerns were expressed by the Opposition in the early stages of the Committee proceedings.

It would be appropriate at this stage to remind the Minister of the widespread concern among those who are worried about the future of our inland waterways. I am grateful that the amendment has been tabled and that flexibility about amending the Bill has been shown in order to meet many of the concerns expressed by the Inland Waterways Association and others. There are about 24,672 readers of *Waterways World*. I have it on good authority that each copy of that magazine bought is read by three other people. The amount of correspondence that we have received shows that absolutely everybody connected with inland waterways is concerned about this issue. That is why the amendment is so important.

It would be worth while to set out how we have reached this stage. We debated this issue for many hours in Committee. We appreciated the opportunity to have consultations with the Minister. However, those consultations ought to have taken place much earlier. There might never have been so much misunderstanding, mistrust and suspicion among all those who use our inland waterways if consultation had taken place much earlier. Nevertheless, amendment No. 1 does not go—surprise, surprise—far enough for us. I intend to explain briefly why.

[Ms. Walley]

We accept that it is perfectly in order for work on canals to take place or for new transport systems to be constructed over, on or below them. However, we do not believe that the definition should be widened. Mistrust has been created by our attempts to try to clarify where responsibilities begin and end. We do not believe that they are set out clearly enough in the definition. I agree with those who criticise those parts of the Bill that deal with inland waterways that ancillary works necessitated by new transport systems could still be carried out under clause 1 and clause 3. No one could blame those concerned for being suspicious. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish referred to the fact that a private Bill is being considered in another place which is causing even greater anxiety than there was to begin with.

There appears to have been piecemeal privatisation of the inland waterways, which has caused much concern and outrage. The question is whether amendment No. 1, to substitute the word "operation" for the word "use" in clause 3, with consequential amendment of the long title to correspond, will remove the general powers aspect from the Bill and ensure that only orders referring to the operation of waterways rather than to their use or extinguishment come within the scope of the clause.

My concern is that orders relating to use or extinguishment could still be made under clause 3. The use of a waterway could be terminated or curtailed as a matter ancillary to the carrying out of works under clause 3. We need an absolute assurance from the Minister that, as the Bill stands and as it might stand under future regulations, we have secured this narrow definition of what would or would not be approved under the order-making procedure.

Orders about use or extinguishment might be made as a matter ancillary to the construction or operation of a waterway. For example, a main line waterway might gain more water for its operations by filling in a branch that took water to work a lock. These are fairly technical matters, and not ones with which I am wholly familiar. I understand, however, that my hon. Friends are very concerned about this issue, too. The abandonment of a branch would be ancillary to the operation of the main line, and could be carried out by order under clause 3. I hope that that will give some idea why we feel that even the new definition in the amendment does not take us far enough.

On consultation generally, we are still concerned that there is no parliamentary procedure for orders under clause 3. I accept that we might return to this matter, but it relates to the scope of the amendments before us. The Minister may point out that there is provision for consultation and appeal in the public inquiry process, but most of that will be left to discretion and subordinate legislation. We are concerned that subordinate legislation will be involved. We would like an assurance that no loss of consultation or right of appeal will result from the substitution of a system of orders under the Bill for the private Bill system that exists now.

Amendment No. 54 is designed to clarify what is meant by "rights of navigation" in clause 3(1)(b)(i). It is intended to prevent a temporary order from interfering on a long-term basis with a boat mooring, landing stage or anything else that a person has a right to keep on the rivers. We would appreciate it if the Minister could confirm whether "rights of navigation" are intended to include the right to keep a vessel or anything else on the waterways.

7 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will my hon. Friend press the Minister on the question of the width of the canal, because I am concerned about traditional boats being able to get through? I understand that, in at least one example, the British Waterways Association has fractionally narrowed the width of a lock gate and, as a result, a whole group of boats is unable to use that stretch of canal.

Ms. Walley: When I said that my hon. Friends knew more about these technical matters than I do, I did not expect such an immediate example. My hon. Friend has made a good point. If the width or gauge—or whatever is the correct navigational term—is too small and is preventing the effective operation of the waterways system, my hon. Friend is right to press the Minister for an assurance that the waterways system will not be restricted because of such a technical matter. I hope that the Minister will reassure us on that.

As I said, amendment No. 54 deals with the right to keep a vessel or anything else on the waterways. It is important because the definition in the Transport Act 1968 is wide. It relates specifically to the right to keep a vessel or craft on the water. The problem is that there is no definition in the Bill. Therefore, there is an anomaly. We should know what the Bill is supposed to cover, and I hope that the Minister can clarify it.

It is fair to say that all those connected with the waterways movement—avid readers of *Waterways World*, those who keep boats on the waterways or those who just enjoy walking along them—are concerned that no attempt has been made by the Government to restrict the powers in the Bill to temporary works on waterways. The Inland Waterways Association and its friends continue to remain suspicious that the Bill's real intention is to close waterways and build transport systems along their dry beds. I should be concerned if we did not get the assurance for which my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish has asked. We do not want to see the decline of our waterways in that way.

No protection against temporary closure exists in part VII of the Transport Act 1968, and none is proposed in the Bill. Rights of navigation still exist on rivers. It would be helpful if the Minister could assure us that any modification or suspension of navigation rights will be temporary and will be kept within reasonable time limits should works be proposed on rivers under clause 3.

I should like to remind the Minister that consultation with the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council exists for only two thirds of inland waterways in the country. It is concerned only with waterways under the ownership or management of the British Waterways board, whereas the Bill affects all waterways. It is important that some consideration should be given to whether the IWAAC's remit could be extended to cover all waterways since it is clear that many important issues are related to the operations that could come about as a result of the Bill and the amendments. If we are to feel that we have the safeguards we want, IWAAC needs some teeth in any Government review.

I hope that the Minister can reassure us on the issues that I have outlined. Such reassurances might further reduce the suspicion that still exists among those who use inland waterways.

Mr. Spearing: I must declare an interest, as I have been a member of the Inland Waterways Association for many years. I said in Committee that the way in which the Government have handled clause 3 is totally unsatisfactory and does not bring any assurance of their good faith. That was said time and again in Committee, and it should be said again now and quoted chapter and verse.

The canals in Britain have been a matter of controversy for many years. The foundation Act, the Transport Act 1968, which was the responsibility of my noble Friend Lady Castle was a landmark—or a watermark. For the first time, it provided protection for amenity waterways that were part of the landscape and heritage of the country and not just for recreational or transport use. The water was first ruffled—to use an analogy—during the passage of the Water Bill in 1973, when there was a proposal to absorb the whole of the then co-ordinated waterways system under the British Waterways Board into the regional water authorities then being proposed. An enormous public campaign ensued and the canals were detached, fortunately, from that important Act.

After that, the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council was appointed by the House as a statutory body specifically to look after the amenity aspects of the waterways. Yet, as we saw in Committee, in the Government's response to the Select Committee on Procedure's report on private Bills, there was no hint that inland waterways would be an integral part of the Bill.

The original hearings of that Committee dealt with harbours. In a harbour, particularly at its upper end, there is frequently a relatively short stretch of inland waterway or impounded harbour. That was the first issue that we were aware of that related to waterways. In Committee, I challenged the Minister to say when these matters were first brought to the attention of the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council.

We heard in the end—the Minister cannot deny this—that, as late as October last year, the Minister's official representative on that waterways statutory Committee did not give any notice of the intention to include new clause 3. When the Minister replied to the quotations from parliamentary answers which I read into column 118 of the report of the Committee's proceedings, he could say only that the hon. Member had the Command Paper from which I read, but he could not deny my charge that inland waterways were not included. We got off to a bad start, and I hope that the Minister will agree that I have not been unfair in my broad description of events.

It is even more of a shame that we cannot make further progress on the report. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) properly said that one part of a waterway will have an intimate effect on another, even the impounding of the headwater which forms the reservoir at the summit of any canal system. A reservoir usually has no navigable connection with the rest of the canal system but is an amenity which is usually and almost entirely owned by the British Waterways Board. It is very valuable property.

The board has large areas of land adjacent to canals and it also has the advantage of being able to sell water. They are an integral part of the drainage system which has grown up for a century or more around the canals.

One of the board's most valuable assets, to which my hon. Friend referred in passing, is the wayleave. One of the features of the canal which we know as the Regent canal, or the Grand Union canal, running from Greenford to what was the Regent's canal dock in Limehouse, is that much of the towpath is used for high tension electricity lines. They are easily installed, easily accessible and easily maintained. British Waterways receives some rent, and good luck to it, but the value of such a wayleave can hardly be exaggerated.

The use of the adjacent land to which I referred is often governed by the original canal Acts, which date from when the canals were constructed a century, or in some cases two centuries, ago. As we know from earlier debates, the Minister, with the powers in clause 3, can change any of those Acts. The Minister may know of a controversy at the moment in the Watford area. I do not know what the future holds for those canals, but I know what it would hold if the party of my noble Friend Lady Castle had anything to do with it. However, I also know what will happen if we have the misfortune of a continuation of the present Administration.

If the Bill is passed, the Government will have in their hands powerful statutory instruments of power if, alas, they are able to use them—I do not think that they will be so able. I do not think that they deserve to. Whatever amends may have been made with a few concessions here and there, their general behaviour on the issue of inland waterways and the lack of proper notification to the statutory bodies bodes ill for their future. Therefore, the safeguards which I and my hon. Friends wish to write into the Bill have every justification. If they are not accepted here or in another place, suspicion will not be dispersed but will, properly—and for good reason—increase.

Mr. McLoughlin: We have gone over the course of the consultation and when the issue first appeared in the Bill on numerous occasions. I return to the question of the private Bill and the new procedures——

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Just say sorry.

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman says, "Just say sorry," but I have made my views on consultation clear. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) for the constructive way in which we proceeded when the problem was brought to my attention. However, the issue was covered in the Government's original consultation document published in June 1990—Command Paper 1110, paragraph 49. I shall not read it out.

Ms. Walley: I do not wish to go over ground that we have covered again and again in Committee, but does the Minister believe that the problem is that one part of the Department of the Environment did not know what the Department of Transport was doing?

7.15 pm

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Lady can draw her own conclusions, and she has. Whatever I say will not change them, so I shall not waste the House's time in trying to do so.

[Mr. McLoughlin]

There was definitely an attempt to reach a general agreement, and I accept that a reassurance was needed. I now know that the editor of *Waterways World* is a constituent of mine. I can assure the hon. Lady that, for a number of reasons, I shall try to placate and meet the representations made by that publication and that those reasons may not be unconnected with the events that may occur in the next few months.

I was asked a number of specific questions which I shall try to answer. Some of the general questions will be dealt with during debates on other amendments, so I shall not attempt to deal with them now. That is true especially of some of the questions asked by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) asked whether there would be an increase in charges. Even before I had received a note from the Box, I had written on my own notes that we see no reason why charges should be increased. The measure is not designed specifically to increase them.

Temporary work closures will be covered during the debate on the next group of amendments and general powers will be covered in the debate on Government amendment No. 20. The question of width reduction requires an order under the Transport Act 1968. If Government amendment No. 24 is passed, it will continue to do so. Therefore, I do not think that there will be any difficulty in convincing the House of the need to accept that amendment.

The consultations and meetings held during the Committee stage were undoubtedly useful. Government amendments Nos. 1 and 53 go some way—not all the way, because there are more amendments to be considered—to meeting some of the concerns expressed to us.

Ms. Walley: Knowing what I now know about the relationship between the Minister and his constituent——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I was a little remiss. The hon. Lady needs the leave of the House to speak again.

Ms. Walley: With the leave of the House, I should like to draw attention to the Minister's remarks about the editor of *Waterways World*. If we have not been granted all the concessions, perhaps we can look forward to further concessions in another place in view of the impending general election.

Amendment agreed to.

Ms. Walley: I beg to move amendment No. 95, in page 2, line 13, at end insert

'or Part VII of the Transport Act 1968'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may also consider the following amendments: No. 3, in page 2, line 15, at end insert—

'(4) Nothing in this section shall in any way supersede the provisions of Part VII of the Transport Act 1968.'.

Government amendment No. 24.

No. 60, in schedule 1, page 33, line 12, at end insert 'other than land under an inland waterway'.

No. 55, in clause 11, page 6, line 34, at end insert 'and

(c) where such an order as is mentioned in section 5(6) above is required so as to give effect to any of the proposals, any person who is entitled to be consulted under Schedule 13 to the Transport Act 1968 in respect of that Order.'

No. 56, in clause 15, page 9, line 14, at beginning insert 'Subject to subsection (3A) below,'.

No. 57, in page 9, line 18, at end insert—

'(3A) Regulations under this section shall not—

(a) exclude the application of any provision in Part VII of the Transport Act 1968; or

(b) modify the application of any such provision so as to deprive any person of the right to receive notification of any matter or of the opportunity to make representations or objections in relation to any matter.'.

No. 58, in clause 62, page 30, line 34, after 'transport', insert

'(other than transport over an inland waterway)'.

No. 59, in page 30, line 41, at end insert

'(and for the purposes of this definition the definition of "harbour" in section 57(1) of that Act shall have effect as if after the words "sea-going ships" there were inserted the words "of at least 500 deadweight tons")'.

Ms. Walley: I shall be brief, because it is important that we make progress.

Under Government amendment No. 26, the Secretary of State is given discretion not to make an order if it can be achieved by other means. Therefore, if it does not go far enough to remove from the scope of the Bill matters which at present are firmly within part VII of the Transport Act 1968, there is an anomaly with the Harbours Act 1964.

The purpose of the amendment is to ascertain why, if it is right to exclude matters whose primary object can be carried out under the Harbours Act, it is not right to exclude matters under the Transport Act when the primary object is a matter under the Transport Act. That harks back to what the Government's intentions really are. We feel that it would be easy for the Minister to accord the Transport Act 1968 equal status with the Harbours Act 1964. An assurance along those lines would go some way towards removing much of the suspicion that still exists.

Amendment No. 55 was tabled to ensure that, when an order was made by the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council or another organisation entitled to be consulted under schedule 13 to the Transport Act 1968, and that body told the Secretary of State that it wanted a hearing, the Secretary of State would be obliged either to give it a hearing or to have a local inquiry.

We should like an assurance that nobody will lose rights of consultation as a result of the new procedure—we are returning to ground that we covered in Committee. We want to know why the IWAAC is not named on the face of the Bill. So far, I have not been convinced by the arguments that it has much greater powers than the Transport Users Consultative Committee, and that therefore it does not need to be named. I should like an assurance that the IWAAC will be consulted. I know that I dwelt briefly on the subject on a previous group of amendments, but we still believe that it is reasonable for a statutory body to be given such an assurance. I shall listen closely to the Minister's reply.

Amendment No. 57 is a substantive amendment, aimed to give amendment No. 56 the force that we would like, by providing in the amendment to clause 15 that an order under part VII of the Transport Act 1968 will continue to be required. The Government have ensured that clause 15 will apply where part VII orders are needed, but under

clause 15(3) the Secretary of State may make regulations modifying the effect of part VII to ensure that proceedings are taken concurrently.

The amendments are designed to ensure that the regulations will not exclude the application of any provision of part VII of the 1968 Act—we come back again and again to the difference between the Bill and the 1968 Act. The amendments are also intended to ensure that no person who had a right to be notified under the 1968 Act would lose that right as a result of the Bill. Again, we need an assurance that the Bill will not prejudice the rights listed in amendment No. 57. I do not want the Government to wriggle out of their responsibilities under the 1968 Act. In Committee, we talked time and again about the safeguards already existing under the 1968 Act, and we feel that the Government could easily give us an assurance that those safeguards will continue, and will not be replaced by new order-making procedures under the Bill.

Amendment No. 58 is an amendment to the definition of the term "guided transport". We imagine that that term was not intended to apply to waterways, and I hope that the Minister will agree. The amendment is designed to ensure that the term cannot be used to cover circumstances in which boats are towed or pushed by external means.

I have already said that the Bill involves many technical matters, and I am learning about them all the time. The matter is not as easy and straightforward as it looks. Although the Minister has given reassurances, I do not believe that he would wish there to be any doubt about the definition of the term "guided transport". Will he reassure us that that term will not be used in relation to that aspect of inland waterways? It seems to me that, as the Bill stands, an order under clause 1 could be made in respect of an inland waterway system in which vessels were towed rather than proceeding under their own power. Why is such a system not excluded under clause 1? Perhaps the Government have no intention of including such a wide definition, but I should like reassurance on the point.

Amendment No. 59 would amend the definition of the term "inland waterway". It was intended to ensure that orders under the Bill could be made in respect of the inland part of the waterways managed by harbour authorities. Will the Minister assure me that the Harbours Act cannot be used for orders in respect of inland waterways? I do not know whether he has already accepted the point—we may be debating an issue which is not really an issue. However, there is only one way of settling the matter—the Minister could do it easily by taking our amendment on board, and relating the provision to ships

"of at least 500 deadweight tons".

That would satisfy us that the Harbours Act could not be used for orders relating to inland waterways.

Schedule 1 is extremely wide—we have found that out in our discussions in Committee. The Government may say that, in relation to waterways, the schedule can be used only in the context of clause 3, but we have already seen that clause 3 is wide open, so that the inland waterways system could be destroyed, or at least radically reduced.

Amendment No. 60, to paragraph 5 of schedule 1, is designed to clarify whether agreements on land apply to land under water. Why is water not mentioned in paragraph 5, although it is mentioned in paragraph 4? What I have said about rights over land and rights over water may be simply a drafting point, but there is an inconsistency. The Government do not seem to have thought the matter through, so we should like an assurance on it.

Mr. McLoughlin: I shall bring the House up to date with our conversations with the inland waterways interests. We wrote to the organisations before tabling our amendments, to explain what we intended to do. When we saw the amendments—other than amendment No. 95, which came later—officials of the Department of the Environment and the Department of Transport sought a meeting with the IWAAC and the Inland Waterways Association in order to gain a better understanding of the amendments. A meeting took place on 10 February. I believe that those present found it helpful. Officials explained why we thought the amendments that they sought were not necessary and, in some cases, not really in their interests. Officials also touched on the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish. (Mr. Bennett). I shall repeat what was said.

I shall also comment at this stage on a letter sent to a number of hon. Members by the chief executive of the Inland Waterways Association after the meeting to which I have just referred. She raised five points. First, she said that the powers in the Bill were extremely wide. That is a matter of judgment. Secondly, she said that the Bill could be used for closing waterways. If amendment No. 24 is carried, that will not be the case. The third point in the letter was that the Bill could alter the constitution of the IWAAC and the British Waterways Board. If amendments Nos. 20 to 22 are carried, that will not be the case. The fourth point was that rights of navigation could be extinguished. That is possible, but not on the BWB canals, because there are no rights there.

The fifth point in the letter was that the powers will exist without parliamentary sanction or binding requirement to consult. We discussed that at great length in Committee. Closure of a waterway will be subject to parliamentary sanction—that comes under part VII of the 1968 Act—and consultation must take place on orders under this Bill, because that will be in the rules which we have already circulated.

The letter also mentions temporary closures. Nothing in part VII of the 1968 Act prevents temporary closures for maintenance. Indeed, the duty of maintenance could not be carried out without them. The Bill makes that position no worse, since no authority is required for temporary closures. If the IWA thought that a waterway authority was abusing its powers, it would have recourse to the courts. That is the only possible solution.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: The Minister talks about safeguarding the rules. I hope that he will confirm that it is up to the Government to change the rules if they wish to do so.

Mr. McLoughlin: I accept that. We went some way to meet the concern about the rules by ensuring that the instruments could be debatable. I hope that the hon. Gentleman approves. We discussed at great length in Committee why there should be rules which were not necessarily on the face of the Bill because events and circumstances change. There was a general acceptance of the reason for rules.

7.30 pm

The amendments fall into a number of sub-groups, and the first comprises amendments Nos. 95, 3 and 24. Government amendment No. 24 fulfils the promise made in Committee and in correspondence with the IWAAC. It preserves from amendment, by order under clause 1 or clause 3, those sections of the Transport Act 1968 that deal with closure and other events concerning inland waterways. It is superior to either amendment No. 95 or amendment No. 3, in that it covers clause 1 as well. Amendment No. 95 really does not help. Unlike orders under the Harbours Act, orders under part VII of the 1968 Act cannot authorise works; they can only give consent to certain of them taking place. If amendment No. 24 is carried, the consent sections of part VII will be preserved. Amendment No. 95 is therefore redundant.

We have looked at part VII to see whether we should have included any more sections, as amendment No. 3 would. Section 111 deals with access agreements. Access agreements exist under countryside legislation to provide the public with access to open country. They are dealt with by local planning authorities and are discretionary, depending on agreement with landowners. The effect of section 111 is to limit the scope of access agreements to BWB's remaining waterways. These days, I doubt whether the House would favour such a limitation. So the preservation of section 111 is likely to make access worse, not better. Section 113 is about byelaws and can have effect only if the waterway owner wishes. Since he also initiates orders, there is little point in specifying that that section must be preserved.

I must confess to being slightly confused by the logic of amendment No. 60. If it is intended to safeguard land under inland waterways, a similar exclusion should have been proposed for paragraphs 3 and 4 of schedule 1, which deal with the acquisition of land and rights in land. The purpose of paragraph 5 is to make it clear that orders under clauses 1 or 3 can adjust or rescind private agreements or contracts relating to land affected by the proposed works. If the Secretary of State were to sanction such a provision, he would be bound by the rules of natural justice to ensure that proper arrangements had been made for protection of the interests affected by this provision and, where necessary, for financial compensation. I can see no reason why inland waterways should be excluded from such provisions.

The effect of amendment No. 60 could be very undesirable. It could, for example, fetter the ability of the Secretary of State to authorise an order for a new railway under the River Thames—or under any other inland waterway for that matter. That is clearly unacceptable, and I hope that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) will not press the amendment.

On amendments Nos. 55 to 57, I recognise the desire of Opposition Members to expand the protection afforded in the Bill to the interests of inland waterway users. I fear, however, that the amendments will not, in practice, have that effect.

I turn to amendment No. 57 and the linked amendment No. 56. If Government amendments Nos. 27 and 28 are carried, it will simply not be possible to do in regulations the second half of what amendment No. 57 seeks to prevent. Regulations under clause 15 will be able only to assimilate two procedures so that the process of giving notice and public inquiries can be run in parallel. It cannot oust the rights of anyone. The first part of amendment No. 57 is positively undesirable, because it would mean that we could not line up schedule 13 to the 1968 Act with the procedure under the Bill. We have explained in detail to the IWAAC what is proposed and shall, of course, consult on the draft of the regulations, which are subject to the annulment procedure. But since what we shall propose would make the promoter—not the Minister—propose closure, and would give a longer objection period and a better inquiry procedure, the IWAAC rather favours what we are doing—or so it said at the meeting.

As a consequence, amendment No. 55 is unnecessary. Schedule 13 already gives, in substance, the rights that amendment No. 55 would confer. Since the regulations to be made under clause 15 displace those rights, organisations representative of waterway organisations will still be able to insist on an inquiry.

I make the general point to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North that, as a result of the Bill, we are moving the locus standi. That is genuinely welcome, because it gives bodies such as the IWAAC and any other body more rights than they had previously. Most people have welcomed that change.

Amendment No. 58 is misconceived. I understand that the Inland Waterways Association which suggested the amendment had in mind that orders could be made under clause 1 to authorise the operation of horse-drawn barges or remote controlled ships on inland waterways. That is wrong, because those vessels would not in themselves constitute a transport system. The system is the inland waterway and any proposal relating to the construction or operation of inland waterways which needed statutory authorisation would come under clause 3.

On amendment No. 59, the definition of "inland waterway" in clause 62 has deliberately been drafted to provide a clear dividing line between waterways to be covered by the Bill and those technically defined as harbours, for which provision is already made in the Harbours Act 1964. The amendment I moved in Committee on 23 January was designed to tighten the definition so that it includes waterways that are owned by harbour authorities, but are not managed by them in their capacity as a harbour authority.

Opposition Members may have reasons, which I must admit I do not see, for wanting to include waterways that are harbours in the scope of part I. I am not aware of any significant advantages of one system over the other, and it would therefore seem practical to let the existing harbour order procedure have precedence. Indeed, I believe that the amendment would considerably muddy the clear delineation we have provided and possibly allow a promoter to apply for a works order under both pieces of legislation. There would be plenty of scope for confusion, both for the applicant and for the Minister responsible for making decisions.

I hope that I have gone some way to explain how we came to our decisions. We have taken on board seriously many of the points raised on numerous occasions. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North for her part in that. Government amendment No. 24 goes some way to meet some of the concerns. I ask the hon. Lady to withdraw the amendment, but to support Government amendment No. 24.

Ms. Walley: We have had a technical and complicated response to technical and complicated amendments. We have set out our concerns time and again, and we accept

that the Government have gone some way to meeting them. I note what the Minister has said. There are some outstanding concerns and we are not sure whether the Government's response to the points made by the IWAAC and by others connected with the waterways shows that their concerns have been taken on board.

I am mindful of the fact that the Bill has not completed all its stages. Indeed, there may be some doubt about whether it will do so before our positions are reversed. Given that the Bill will be considered in another place, and having regard to the Minister's comments about the consultation that has already taken place and about the consultation that he envisages will take place on the regulations, in a spirit of co-operation I ask the Minister to continue with the process of consultation which seemed to be interrupted before the Bill was printed. The Minister has already given an assurance that he will continue that consultation. I hope that it will be taken on board before the Bill goes to its next stage.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 2, line 15, at end insert

'; and any such statutory instrument shall list all those bodies which have been consulted about its content.'.

The amendment is eminently sensible, but as the Secretary of State has not added his name to it, I suspect that the Minister will come up with some excuse for not accepting it. I will listen with interest.

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) caught me out on a number of occasions in Committee by the brevity with which he moved amendments.

I wrote to the hon. Gentleman to explain why we thought that it was not appropriate to accept his proposal. The essential purpose of this amendment is, I understand, to make it easier to check on compliance with any requirements in the procedure rules which we have drafted to consult particular bodies. It seems to me that doing that at the end of the process when the Secretary of State decides on the application is a bit like closing the stable door after the horse has bolted.

Surely it is more logical for the matter of compliance with the rules to be verified as soon as an application has been made. Then, if there has been an unintentional failure to comply with some small requirement, say, it will be possible to correct it before the process of considering the application gets under way. If, however, the rules have been deliberately flouted, the application can be turned away at once.

The hon. Gentleman's amendment also touches on the important subject of consultation before an application is made, which I know some would like to be the subject of comprehensive statutory requirements. I do not intend to rehearse at length my explanation in Committee of the practical difficulties of doing that. Suffice to say that we shall expect all applicants to consult properly with relevant persons as they work out their proposals—applicants will suffer only needless delay to their schemes later if they do not do so. One needs to promote what one will do and try to get general agreement.

It is, of course, reasonable for those who will be affected by schemes to want to find out about them and to comment on them at an early stage. I do not believe, however, that a wide-ranging statutory requirement to consult would help in that respect. The requirement in the draft rules for prospective applicants to consult the local planning authority about proposals in orders for development, and the requirement which will apply in many cases for applicants to prepare environmental statements, will help to ensure that their projects could not be kept out of the public domain for too long.

The stage at which we shall impose statutory requirements on applicants will be when they submit their draft orders in final form to the Secretary of State. The draft procedure rules make comprehensive provision about the people and the organisations to whom they will have to give notice of their application and, in some cases, provide a full set of application documents.

We intend to add to the procedure rules a requirement for applicants to submit an affidavit demonstrating proof of compliance. That will be available for public inspection, and if someone discovers from it that they have not been notified of an application when they should have been, they will, if necessary, be able to seek redress from the courts.

I hope that the change that we intend to make to the rules goes some way toward reassuring the hon. Gentleman of our attempt to try to meet some of his points. I hope that he feels able to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: I am pleased to have the Minister's comments on the record. There is a slight irony about this part of the Bill. The Government told us that they were keen to consult, and that everything would be all right. However, the evidence is that consultation did not take place at the right time. There is some advantage in having the longstop, but when the order is made, it must list all those people who have been consulted.

Since we need to make progress, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 4

DESCRIPTION OF WORKS FOR PURPOSES OF SECTION 3

Amendment made, No. 19, in page 2, line 19, leave out from 'instrument' to 'House' in line 20 and insert

'; but no order shall be made unless a draft of it has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each'.

Clause 5

SUBJECT-MATTER OF ORDERS UNDER SECTIONS 1 AND 3

Mr. McLoughlin: I beg to move amendment No. 20, in page 2, line 27, leave out from 'any' to 'which' in line 28 and insert 'statutory provision'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 4, in page 2, line 30, leave out from '3' to end of line 34.

Government amendments Nos. 21 and 22.

No. 105, in page 2, line 34, at end insert

'provided that both Houses of Parliament have approved by resolution a list or schedule of changes provided for in the order, and that such a list or schedule shall have been laid before each House of Parliament for two months prior to such approval.'.

No. 106, in page 2, line 35, leave out subsection (4).

7.45 pm

Mr. McLoughlin: I undertook in Committee to reconsider the drafting of clause 5(3)(b) because we accepted that the powers that it would confer on the Secretary of State were too wide. As drafted, the provision would allow him to alter permanently legislation which is of general application, without any reference to Parliament—a point on which we had a good debate led by the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer).

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: It was about Henry VIII.

Mr. McLoughlin: Exactly. I probably learned much about parliamentary procedure. I recommend that hon. Members read some of our debates in Committee, as they were well rehearsed.

The Joint Committee recognised that many orders will involve changes to works which have previously been authorised by private Act; so it must be possible for orders to make changes in the law which applies specifically to the works in question, in the same way that private Bills already do. The amendments that we are now proposing will make it clear that that power is to be restricted to Acts and instruments which are of local application only.

It may help the House if I give some examples of what the amendments would and would not allow orders to provide for. They would allow changes in provisions of local application in previous private Acts and hybrid Acts which relate to working or operation of a railway or an inland waterway. The example that I quoted in Committee —the change in the Severn Navigation Act 1842—is one such Act. If, for example, the railway works provided for in the Channel Tunnel Act needed alteration, an order could achieve that, as long as the provisions were of local application only. An order could not alter public legislation or private legislation of a general nature. Thus it would not be possible to change by order the general duties which are contained in the British Waterways Board Bill, presently in another place, should it pass into law.

The amendments will not affect the scope of clause 5(3)(a), which provides for an order to modify or exclude enactments relating to the subject matter of the order. That power properly includes enactments of general application, because it may be necessary to make adjustments to the way in which public general Acts apply where they do not fit the circumstances of a particular case.

I hope that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) will not press his amendment. It would mean that orders could not amend legislation of local application and that, by inference, measures which required that should all come to this House as private Bills. I hope that his amendment was a fly cast across the water in order to raise the fish on the amendment paper in my right hon. Friend's name.

Similarly, I ask the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) not to press amendment No. 105 on this subject. Although it at least retains the possibility of orders amending legislation, it would mean that any order which sought to amend legislation of local application would have to come to Parliament for approval. There are likely to be many instances of that. For example, most orders with compulsory acquisition powers will disapply the Lands Clauses Consolidation Act 1845. It would be unreasonable to delay the aproval of such orders when we have agreed that the essential purpose of the reforms is to remove consideration of local matters from Parliament.

Referring to amendment No.106, I appreciate that the purpose of clause 5(4) is perhaps a little obscure. I can nevertheless assure the hon. Member for Newham, South that it does not amount to a licence for the Secretary of State to include in orders all sorts of provisions way beyond the scope of the Bill. It is concerned with rather technical matters which have long been included in private Bills.

Subsection (4) is essentially a "sweeping-up" provision. It would sanction, for example, a provision extending a time limit for the exercise of powers granted in a previous order, or a provision which prescribed different dates for the coming into force of different parts of an order. There is nothing more sinister in subsection (4) than that, but, without it, there would be a definite risk that applicants would have to come to Parliament to be sure of getting all the powers necessary to bring their proposals to fruition. That is clearly undesirable, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree not to press amendment 106.

I invite the House to endorse amendments Nos. 20 to 22.

Mr. Spearing: The Minister has referred to amendments Nos.105 and 106. As he has reflected, amendment No.105 would enlighten the House. He said that it would bring the House back into play in matters which it wishes to remove from its purview. Clause 5(3)(b) states that an order may

"make such amendments, repeals and revocations as appear to the Secretary of State to be necessary or expedient in consequence of any provision of the order or otherwise in connection with the order",

and that they should be listed, be known and receive the approval of the House.

My great worry about most of the Bill is not only about the removal of the procedure, over which there can be a legitimate difference of view, but it carries with it the power of the Minister to alter legislation passed by the House. When people believe that their rights are entrenched, if those rights are removed without due notice even to the House, confidence in our procedures could be undermined.

How often have we heard people say, "It is all right: it is entrenched in an Act of Parliament"? People make the reasonable assumption that only another Act of Parliament can repeal or amend a provision. It is a common-sense attitude. As I said earlier, most Members of Parliament probably do not know that an Act can, indeed, be changed or repealed by a statutory instrument, let alone one which, following our earlier discussion, will not even come before the House.

The Minister says that we must have in the Bill the words that I quoted from clause 5. He says that it will not be outside the scope of the Bill. But the scope of the Bill is—I will not say beyond the horizon—tremendous. So I am afraid that the words penned by the Secretary of State or someone else, with the intention of being reassuring, are not in the least reassuring, because the scope is so wide.

Amendment No. 106 seeks to remove the whole of clause 5(4). It is one of the most stringent parts of the Bill. I shall read out subsection 4(a) and connect with it the latter part of subsection 4(a)(iii). It says:

"any provision that appears to the Secretary of State to be necessary or expedient for giving full effect to—. . . an instrument made under an Act of Parliament before that time, and which is of a kind which could be included in an order under section 1 or 3 above;".

"That time" is the time at which the Bill comes into force. In other words, the subsection is a specific formula which allows any Secretary of State to amend any instrument made under an Act, perhaps a long time ago, which comes within the scope of the Bill.

We are talking about retrospectively changing legislation, and not even by means of a new statutory instrument. I still object to the measure in principle. I am afraid that the words that the Secretary of State used are far from reassuring, although they may have been designed with that objective. Alas, I find the reverse.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I have come late to this part of the Bill, but has the hon. Gentleman got it the right way round? Reading subsection (4)(a)(iii), it strikes me that the Secretary of State's power is to give effect to a provision contained in an Act of Parliament. It does not seem to relate to making an order which does not seek to fulfil the purposes of an Act of Parliament passed before this Bill gave the Secretary of State the order-making power. Or have I misunderstood?

Mr. Spearing: I will intervene in the hon. Gentleman's speech, if I may Madam Deputy Speaker. As I understand it, the provision gives the Secretary of State power to change legislation retrospectively when an Act comes within the scope of the Bill. Therefore, any legislation that sets up a railway, tramway, waterway, inland harbour, barrage or anything similar would surely come within the scope of subsection (4)(a)(iii). Therefore, once the Bill is enacted, the Minister will surely have strong retrospective powers. That is entrenched in the Bill.

Mr. Bottomley: My reading is that the Bill gives the Secretary of State power to give effect to a provision in an Act of Parliament. Subsection (4)(a)(iii) does not enable him to destroy a power created in a previous Act of Parliament. The Bill gives the Secretary of State the power to reinforce an Act and make it effective.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Bill allows an order to overcome provisions in a local act of local significance, as an order can overcome a private Bill. In Committee, hon. Members expressed anxiety that the original powers were far too wide and could overcome any legislation. Today we have sought to tighten and tidy up the powers in response to the points made in Committee.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 21, in page 2, line 31, after 'revocations', insert

'of statutory provisions of local application'.

No. 22, in page 2, line 34, at end insert

'and for the purposes of this subsection "statutory provision" means provision of an Act of Parliament or of an instrument made under an Act of Parliament.'—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Mr. McLoughlin: I beg to move amendment No. 23, in page 3, line 6, at end add—

'(6) An order under section 1 or 3 above shall not extinguish any public right of way over land unless the Secretary of State is satisfied—

(a) that an alternative right of way has been or will be provided, or

(b) that the provision of an alternative right of way is not required.'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 6, in page 3, line 6, at end add—

'(6) An order under section 1 or 3 above shall not extinguish any public right of way over land unless the Secretary of State is satisfied that a reasonably convenient alternative right of way exists or will be provided.'.

Mr. McLoughlin: The amendment fulfils another promise which I gave in Committee to consider whether further provision was necessary in the Bill to protect footpaths and bridleways which may be affected by works proposed in orders under clauses 1 or 3 of the Bill.

As I told the Committee, I should prefer to base a provision about this on section 251 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 because that example allows the Secretary of State some discretion in deciding whether the circumstances of a case justify the provision of an alternative right of way. However, I understand that the Rights of Way Review Committee favours amendment No. 6, proposed by the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn). This is based on section 14 of the Highways Act 1980 and would mean that in any case where an order under clauses 1 or 3 included a provision for extinguishing a right of way it would be necessary to provide a reasonably convenient alternative route if one did not already exist.

While I have much sympathy with those who are concerned to protect our footpath network, I consider that the hon. Gentleman's amendment is a little too inflexible. It would clearly not be sensible to oblige an applicant for an order to incur the cost of providing a diversion if it would not be used. I gather that, because of this restriction, the definition of "reasonably convenient" has been stretched somewhat when new roads have been built. But the amendment is a bad way of proceeding. Our amendment is much clearer. We shall, of course, issue guidance to applicants about how rights of way issues will be assessed, and I shall be happy to consult the Rights of Way Review Committee about that in due course.

I hope that the hon. Member for Southport will not feel it necessary to press his amendments as I have given an assurance that I will meet the wishes of the Rights of Way Review Committee.

Mr. Snape: I shall be brief. I wish to ask the Minister whether the rights of way referred to in an amendment include rights of way over water as well as over land. I do not expect him to give me an instant reply, but if they do not, that would sit rather oddly with Government amendment No. 33, which specifies that rights of way over land include rights of navigation over water, and paragraph 10 of schedule 1, where rights of way over land are specified as including rights of navigation over water. I hope that those who, if not walk on the water, sail on it, are not to be treated worse than those who enjoy rights of way over land. I should be grateful if the Minister would clarify that point.

Mr. Fearn: In view of what the Minister said, I have no wish to press amendment No. 6. Earlier, I raised a point about the disabled which has still not been dealt with. It may come under this amendment. I should be grateful if the Minister could answer the point now.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) may not want to press amendment No. 6, but my name was added to it and I believe that it has some merits over Government amendment No. 23. The term "reasonably convenient" would be useful in the Bill. I am certainly conscious that the Rights of Way

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

Review Committee includes the Ramblers Association and other bodies that are experts on footpath matters, at least nationally. However, such bodies tend to depend on volunteers. In some parts of the country, they do not have the coverage that they or I would like, so one finds that often footpath matters have to be taken up by someone who does not know all the details of the legislation.

If "reasonably convenient" is included in the Bill it will be a good hint or guide to anyone pursuing a case that he has a line of argument or attack when a closure or diversion is proposed by an organisation. There is a great deal of difference between providing an alternative and providing a "reasonably convenient" alternative. The Minister ought to make it easy for people who may be affected by legislation to appreciate the rights and arguments that they can use without needing to consult national bodies which are experts on such matters or seek legal advice from a lawyer.

The Minister should reconsider the matter to find out why the phrase "reasonably convenient" cannot be on the face of the Bill, because it is the sort of phrase that a lay person will understand. It is important that legislation is easy for people to understand if it diverts footpaths.

The Minister says that he cannot accept amendment No. 6 and insert those words in the Bill because it would mean that an alternative path would have to be made, even if no one used it. The Minister knows that, if no one uses a path, it is easy for it to be closed. A notice is served and no one objects to the closure if no one uses the path. Therefore, there is no difficulty. If people use a path, it is not satisfactory to put in an alternative. It is important that it is a reasonably convenient alternative.

I hope that, if the Minister does not accept amendment No. 6 now, he will consider whether the words can be inserted in the House of Lords—I know that he is keen for no amendments to be made there—so that people outside who have to work with this legislation and who are not experts will get a hint from the wording of the Bill.

8 pm

Mr. McLoughlin: To answer the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape)—as I was not able to do in an intervention—rights of way over water are in effect rights of navigation. Both are covered by the Bill.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) asked earlier about the rights of disabled people, and he also asked me about their rights in relation to the provision of crossings which may be affected by closing the rights of way over railways. When we consider crossings, we bear in mind rights for disabled people. We try to accommodate them. They do not have many rights at level crossings of any description at present, because of the roughness of the ground and the rail tracks. However, I am sure that that will be improved as a result of earlier amendments, because it will obviously be taken into consideration, although it is a matter for the operator to decide.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) asked me to consider his amendment more fully. Of course I shall consider it in the light of the representations that he has made. I am prepared to meet the Rights of Way Review Committee to discuss what it is proposing and to try to achieve some agreement. If we cannot get agreement, it may well be pursued in another place, but I hope that we can achieve a general agreement which will satisfy the people involved.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: If the Minister hopes to have a further meeting before the legislation moves to another place, can he tell us the timetable in another place? Is it true that the Bill has to be finished by 16 March?

Mr. McLoughlin: I shall deal with this place and worry about the timetable here. I hope that we can make progress tonight. On that understanding, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not press his amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 9

SCHEMES OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Mr. McLoughlin: I beg to move amendment No. 86, in page 5, line 8, at end insert

'unless that provision gives effect to modifications of the proposal which have themselves been approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament passed on a motion moved by a Minister of the Crown'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 85, in page 5, line 8, at end insert—

'(5A) Where the findings of any public inquiry held under section 11 of this Act are inconsistent with the proposals approved by a resolution in accordance with this section an order shall not be made unless a draft of it has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.'.

Mr. McLoughlin: Amendment No. 86 would enable the Secretary of State to invite Parliament to vote for a new resolution relating to a scheme of national significance in circumstances where he wanted to modify the order in such a way that it would conflict with the terms of the original resolution approved by Parliament. Although we would expect that to be a rare occurrence, we think that circumstances could arise when—probably following a public inquiry and in the light of the inspector's subsequent recommendations—the Secretary of State would want to make changes to the order which were not wholly consistent with the terms of the resolution.

As clause 9 is currently drafted, it would be impossible for the Secretary of State to make those changes, even if there was a broad agreement that they were desirable or necessary, without starting the whole authorisation process from the beginning. We think that that is too inflexible and could militate against good decision-making, because the Secretary of State might be tempted to turn down desirable modifications in the interests of making progress with the project.

The amendment would mean that the Secretary of State would be able—subject to Parliament's approval to a new resolution—to modify the order in a way which properly reflected the outcome of the inquiry and the inspector's recommendations. However, before going back to Parliament, the Secretary of State would have to proceed in accordance with the procedures in clause 13(3). That would involve notifying every person who would be affected by the modifications to the scheme and giving those persons an opportunity of making representations to him.

In certain circumstances—for example, where new statutory objectors insisted on a right to be heard—the

public inquiry would have to be reopened to examine the proposed changes. It might also be necessary for the applicant to prepare a supplementary environmental statement. The Secretary of State would almost certainly want to publish the Inspector's report at the same time as he announced that he was minded to make changes to the order.

Assuming that the Secretary of State was satisfied, following the outcome of further consultations, that the amendments should be made, he would table a new resolution, which would be debated in each House. He would also arrange for all relevant supporting documents to be deposited in Parliament. The timing of the debates would be a matter for the business managers but would have to allow Members of this House and the other place sufficient time to have read the additional material, including the inspector's report, and to have received representations from the public.

I hope that the way in which we have moved forward meets some of the concerns expressed by members of the Committee, and that the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) will not press amendment No. 85, on the basis that our amendment achieves what he wants but does not fetter the Secretary of State's discretion.

Mr. Fearn: I am afraid that I must still press my amendment No. 85, because I wish to release public inquiries from the straitjacket which seems to surround them, even with the amendment tabled by the Government. That straitjacket will be worn if clause 9 is unamended.

Many organisations, such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the National Trust, are concerned that clause 9 has reversed the procedure recommended by the Government in their consultation paper. They believe that Parliament would have inadequate information on which to base its considerations. Since detailed objections will not have been heard, Parliament will be in no position to judge the reasons for public decisions or concerns. What is even more serious is that it is inevitable that, once Parliament has blessed a project in principle, the terms of reference of any public inquiry will be severely constrained. That will give rise to frustration on the part of objectors and to limitations on the scope and value of any public inquiry.

The danger is that public perception of the impartiality of public inquiries will be affected. Such inquiries command public confidence because inspectors are seen to be genuinely impartial and feel free to make recommendations which have radical or minor significance.

The Secretary of State has recognised some of the difficulties by moving his amendment, but that does not go far enough. Under my amendment, if a public inquiry makes a recommendation which is inconsistent with the original recommendation passed by Parliament, the Secretary of State must bring the matter back before both Houses for approval, even if the draft order is consistent with the original resolution. In other words, Parliament will have the opportunity to debate and vote on the scheme again when in full possession of all the facts and evidence and has knowledge of public opinion.

I listened intently to what the Minister said about his amendment, but it does not go far enough. My amendment will put the matter right.

Mr. McLoughlin: I do not see what point the hon. Gentleman's amendment would serve. If Parliament has already agreed in principle, I see no point in Parliament agreeing to it again. Parliament should be consulted if there is a major change, but it should not be asked to confirm something to which it has already agreed.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: In certain circumstances, the situation could change. There could be a general election and a different Parliament might be involved. That would make it a different issue. *[Interruption.]* If the Whip, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick), wishes to intervene, I shall be happy to give way. If he wants us to stay here a long time, I shall also be happy to oblige. I point out to him that I moved an amendment very quickly, and I could move another series of amendments quickly. However, if the Whip wants to prolong the debate by making such interventions from a sedentary position, I shall oblige by continuing to talk.

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman has said that, if a general election takes place or if there is a change in the political circumstances, Parliament might want to review the matter. I take that point, but it would be open to the Secretary of State not to make the order.

Mr. Bennett: It would be left to the Secretary of State to decide to make the order, but I am sure that the Minister is well aware that issues such as this do not necessarily divide the House on party political lines. What divides hon. Members who are more interested in conservation from those who are not sometimes depends on whether they represent urban or rural constituencies.

If the public inquiry is to have the chance to air the issues, and if we are concerned about the democratic process, those on the inquiry will not only try to influence the inspectorate, but they should also try to influence the whole country. If strong arguments emerge at that inquiry, Parliament may want to take them into account.

The Minister has a dilemma with the Bill. All we can do is see how in practice it will work. I suspect that, sooner or later, Parliament will give approval to something as a result of initial consideration, and an inquiry will be held and various points will be starkly brought out. The Minister, believing that Parliament has already approved the matter, will want to give the go-ahead. However, if Parliament were tested, it might decide that as a result of the public inquiry, circumstances had changed.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 11

INQUIRIES AND HEARINGS

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I beg to move, amendment No.113 in page 6, line 19, after 'heard', Insert

subject to section 11(7) below.'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this is will be convenient to take the following amendments: No.114, in page 6, line 20, at end insert—

'(2A) The Secretary of State may give a person who makes an objection in accordance with rules under section 10 assistance with legal and administrative costs incurred before, during and after an appearance before a person appointed by the Secretary of State.'.

No. 115, in page 6, line 34, at end insert

[Madam Deputy Speaker]

'and (c) any community or environmental group which is representative of any local authority area in which works authorised by the proposed order are to be carried out;'.

No. 116, in page 6, line 35, leave out 'paragraph (a)' and insert 'paragraphs (a) and (c)'.

No. 117, in page 6, line 38, at end insert

'and for the purposes of paragraph (c) above, community and environmental group means conservation, archaeological, art or environmental or similar group.'.

No. 118, in page 7, line 4, at end add—

'(7) No person shall be appointed by the Secretary of State without approval being sought from the community and environmental groups under section 11(4)(c).'.

Mr. Hughes: Such is the bizarre nature of our business that I sprinted over to the House an hour ago thinking it was time to move my amendment. I have had time to watch two television programmes since then.

Mr. Snape: The hon. Gentleman should have been listening to the debate.

Mr. Hughes: I have been in and out of the Chamber. The amendments have three interrelated aims. Amendment Nos. 113 and 115 attempt to widen the number of people who are consulted about an application. Amendment No. 114 seeks to give groups financial assistance when they appear before a public inquiry. Amendment No. 118 will give the local community some say in the selection of inspectors at a public inquiry. I hope that it is clear to the House that the theme which connects the amendments is a desire to give community groups a greater say in planning applications.

Traditionally, much of the private business that has gone through the House has been of relevance to London Members. One of the strongest arguments against changing the procedures governing that business and transferring much of it from the House is that we spend a great deal of time dealing with railway and underground legislation that has specific relevance to Members representing London. The King's Cross Railways Bill, for example, has occupied much of the House's time.

I have been here for nine years, and in most of that time, we have passed one or more private Bills that have affected Southwark and Bermondsey. It is often a difficult battle to try to get the legislation right and to force the promoters to accept a change. Therefore, in many senses the idea of replacing a parliamentary debate and Committee stage in two Houses with a public inquiry is a welcome one. However, the proposal has defects, and I hope that the Minister will be sympathetic to my amendments.

I listened to the earlier debate about the timetable to which the Government are working. I noted that the Minister was careful not to talk about the timetable in the other place. I understand that the Government are not keen to accept amendments in this place, but I hope that if the Minister considers that they contain good ideas, he will redraft them and re-present them as Government amendments tabled in another place.

8.15 pm

Amendment No. 115 would add to clause 11 as another category eligible to give evidence at a hearing

"any community or environmental group which is representative of any local authority area in which works authorised by the proposed order are to be carried out".

The amendment is designed to ensure that such groups are included in any inquiry, but that those groups have links with the area in question. A traditional complaint about public inquiries is that too many interest groups try to muscle in. Often those groups may represent general environment and community interests, but have no specific area interest.

Under the Bill as it stands, the only people to be consulted are those directly affected by the compulsory acquisition of land under application and the local authority. I want to make it abundantly clear, by adding a third category, that area community groups should also be included.

I have sought to define what I mean by environmental and community groups in amendment No. 117, which lists them as any

"conservation, archaeological, art or environmental or similar group."

Such groups should exist within the relevant local authority area that is affected by a prescribed order.

Sometimes community groups feel that their local authority does not adequately represent their views—some feel that more strongly than others. The London Underground Bill is now in another place between its Committee and Report stages. When the Bill was in Committee in this House, the tenants association of the Canada estate of Rotherhithe petitioned the Committee and sought to persuade it that there was a risk to the well-being and structure of the estate if the line ran directly under it. The association managed to secure the agreement of the Committee that a survey should be carried out.

The tenants association then put its case to the Committee in the other place—I was witness at both Committees. It did not succeed in persuading that Committee, and it felt that one of the reasons for that failure was that the local authority, Southwark, withdrew its original petition of support. As a consequence of that decision, the tenants association felt let down and felt that it could not rely on the authority.

It would be a bad state of affairs if the only way in which community groups could be represented was via a local authority that, for one reason or another, might not want to represent their interests.

The other simple purpose of the amendments is to ensure that those groups who represent certain interests are those that relate to the specific area affected. The Minister will be aware of the Thameslink proposal which will cross London north to south. That proposal will have severe implications in terms of demolition around the Borough market in Southwark by London Bridge station. Listed buildings, including the hop exchange in Southwark street, are also under threat.

The residents association in the Southwark cathedral area has been conscientious in looking after the interests of the area, as has the North Southwark community development group. Their concern about that Bill rightly prompted the suggestion that this Bill could be amended in this way. They speak for many groups around the country in relation to many Bills or public inquiries. I hope that their case will be heard.

Amendment No. 114 deals with financial assistance. As the Minister and his Department know, local groups often cannot hire professionals to pay for promotional expertise to present their case. Extremely high costs are often involved in public inquiries. People lose wages or salaries

through taking time off work and community groups must pay for documents that provide evidence. The amendment seeks to build in an entitlement to financial assistance.

I recently asked the Minister's Department whether the families of those who died and those who survived the Marchioness tragedy could have legal assistance in giving evidence to the inquiry on river safety that the Government have announced. So far, the answer has been no. The families feel aggrieved about that.

The fact that people do not have financial assistance in planning inquiries is a common cause of complaint. It is a great unfairness because on one side there are public authorities, Government Departments, British Rail and London Underground; on another there are private companies to which huge amounts of money are available, and sometimes rich individuals; a third group is composed of individuals, often on low incomes, or community groups with no significant resources, representing areas where the residents have low incomes. It is about time we had a fair system, and this would be an appropriate time to achieve one.

On amendment No. 118, one of the problems of the public inquiry system is that no one other than the Secretary of State has a say about who the inspector should be. I do not wish to complain about any particular inspector. In my nine years as an MP, I have been to many public inquiries and I did so in my previous job. However, there should be some arrangement to ensure that, where possible, there is consultation on the inspector and that a list of possible inspectors is available, in the same way as we have lists of approved contractors for local authorities. In that way, inquiries could be made to ensure that the inspector meets the approval of the community as a whole.

All inspectors could then be approved and selected. Just as in industrial tribunals, where trade unions and employers each traditionally nominate a member and there is an independent member, so there should be some say in ensuring that the planning inspectorate is fair and representative.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In tribunals, people cannot pick those who will hear their case. They may be part of an organisation that helps to nominate people, but they cannot have their unfair dismissal case heard if people are allocated.

Mr. Hughes: That is a perfectly valid point, but there is a difference. Represented groups at tribunals participate in the process, whereas there is no participation process in relation to Government-appointed inspectors, and no one else has a say.

If we are in favour of open planning processes, giving the only right to appoint an inspector to the Government of the day cannot be the fairest way to proceed. The amendment seeks to suggest a fairer way. I should be grateful for a positive response from the Minister to that amendment, as to the others. I am ever hopeful, and I hope that, even if the Minister cannot give me all that I seek now, he will say that it can be achieved before the Bill is enacted.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). He will be holding his breath for a long time if he is waiting for a positive response to the points that he has raised today. I was a little surprised to hear the hon. Gentleman's admission that he had come to the Chamber an hour earlier and, on seeing that his amendments were nowhere near being reached, went to watch television rather than following the progress of the Bill. This is the first time that the hon. Gentleman has made an appearance at the Bill's Committee or Report stages. For those of us who have been following the Bill from the outset, it comes as a surprise that the hon. Gentleman expects a positive response.

On amendment No. 114, the case for the public funding of objectors attending public inquiries has been presented many times in recent years. However, the Government remain of the view that those participating in public inquiries can reasonably be expected to meet their own costs. Although local objectors have every right to express their individual or collective views in defence of their interests, it would not be right to provide public funds for that purpose. Any funding scheme would involve a process of selection that could give rise to an accusation of bias and call into question the Secretary of State's impartiality in deciding the schemes. That could arise either from the Secretary of State's choosing to distribute funds among objectors or because he was seen to be favouring objectors over prospective developers.

Furthermore, to make an exception for the purpose of the Bill from the long-established policy against paying objectors' costs would be an undesirable precedent with potentially far-reaching implications. It would inevitably lead to similar claims being made by objectors at public inquiries into other work schemes, and the scale of the potential costs to the taxpayer is self-evident.

Mr. Cryer: Is not the Minister in a good position as regards clause 10? Happily, the Committee amended clause 10 to allow him to make a statutory instrument subject to anulment. Subsection (5) says:

"Rules under this section may make different provision for different cases".

That means that rules can be a useful guide and could be set as a statutory instrument. Therefore, the Secretary of State would not be seen to be being dragged into individual allocations. Assistance would be provided according to rules and he could then single out, under the rules, poverty-stricken tenants groups, for example, and exclude the fat cats from the corporations who wish to object. That would create a basis of fairness.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am not sure whether that is a commitment that Labour Members may want to make. I have expressed the Government's position—we do not see funds being made available for those cases. The hon. Gentleman may be right. As the Bill stands, the hon. Gentleman could increase public expenditure in that area and those cases if he so wished.

Mr. Snape: If the Minister is conceding defeat at this early stage in the election proceedings, that is a significant matter. Perhaps he should be back in his constituency knocking on a few doors in case the defeat washes him away.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am fairly confident that those schemes for objectors will not be funded for a considerable time, irrespective of the outcome of the general election, whenever it may happen. We serve no useful purpose by debating the outcome of an election. No one knows what will happen, but I am fairly confident that we shall remain on this side of the Chamber and the Opposition will remain on theirs.

[Mr. McLoughlin]

I should like to explain to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey the advantages of the Bill as opposed to the old system of private Bills. Groups will not have to prove locus standi, and the costs of appearing at a public inquiry are far lower than those of appearing in Parliament. The Bill will give many more opportunities to groups that wish to present a case to a public inquiry than the present private Bill procedure does. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will accept that.

The other amendments seek to establish a statutory role for community groups. How can a community group represent a local authority area? That is a job for a local authority and Members of Parliament. I was surprised at the hon. Gentleman's somewhat dismissive attitude towards what the Southwark authority had done, bearing in mind that the Liberal Democrats usually stand so firm behind the rights of local councillors, and state that they are the best people to make decisions, come what may. He does not seem to want to follow that policy through.

8.30 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes: I do not want to enter a party political debate. However, local authorities may or may not do a good job—they are not normally representative due to the electoral system, but we cannot do anything about that. Members of all parties, including Liberal Democrats, make the perfectly valid argument that community groups and voluntary sector groups should be able to speak separately from the local authorities, as they may have different interests.

Mr. McLoughlin: Amendment No. 115 states:

"any community or environmental group which is representative of any local authority area in which works authorised by the proposed order are to be carried out".

I have to go by what the amendment states, not by what the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey may have meant it to mean. Earlier, I heard my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) say that he understood why the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey wished to divorce his remarks from those of Tower Hamlets council—I can understand that.

Amendment No. 118 seeks a role for community groups for vetting the appointment of inspectors. That is absolute madness and clearly wrong. It is of the utmost importance to uphold the impartiality of inspectors. Inquiries have to be fair, and be seen to be fair, by all those involved, including the promoters. That position could not be sustained if appointments were subject to the approval of specific groups on one side of the argument or the other.

Inspectors are chosen for their experience in dealing with the subject matter and their availability. I know of no instance where the selection of inspectors has been controversial. The hon. Gentleman will next be saying that the prosecution should have a vetting right over a judge in a court case. I do not think that his suggestion stands up to scrutiny, and I ask the House to reject the amendment.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I shall take the last point first. The Minister chose the wrong analogy. In a court, the defendant has the right to challenge members of the jury, who are the people who make the decision.

Lords Commissioner to the Treasury (Mr. Irvine Patnick): It is not the jury.

Mr. Hughes: No, that is the fallacy. The Whip is making a fallacious point. It is not the judge who makes the decision, but the jury, who can be challenged. The defendant has to put up with whichever magistrate he or she is given. However, I am trying to find the best system for planning inquiries.

On the Minister's rejection of my point about community groups, he either does not understand or does not want to understand that a local authority interest is often different from the interests of those who are representative of an area that is smaller than that of the local authority. In authorities with thousands of residents —for example, Tower Hamlets or Southwark—all the residents will not necessarily have the same view. Those living around Southwark cathedral, or Rotherhithe, or Surrey docks, or Bow or Poplar will not necessarily have the same views.

The Minister has put his case clearly. If the Government hold to that view, the community and voluntary sectors will study their policies with interest. I think that they will become much more sympathetic to the Opposition's argument on the future of the planning system and will react adversely to the Conservative view.

The Minister said that the Government are not willing to fund people who otherwise might find it difficult to raise the money. It may or may not be cheaper to take time off work to attend and prepare for a public inquiry than to take time off to prepare for a Committee in the House of Commons or the House of Lords. I do not necessarily think that it would be. The same expenses are generally incurred. Lay people often have to battle against lawyers, and the process is unfair.

It is typical of all parts of the Tory Government to want to preserve the status quo that is to the advantage of those who are well-off, with resources, and to the disadvantage of those who are less well-off and who do not have resources. I leave it to those who read the debate and are interested in the subject to decide. As always, the Tory party is never willing to look at ways of making the system fairer, when given such a golden opportunity to do so.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I wish to say something about the hon. Gentleman's speech before he goes back to watching television, or whatever he was doing before the debate.

My experience of reading inspectors' reports is that inspectors are often affected by what ordinary people say on their own behalf, which is a good sign of confidence in the system. Inspectors prove far more challenging opponents of those who are professionally represented, and often gain modifications in the proposals of public authorities. One person, without much experience of appearing before public inquiries, can come and say what their interest is and what they would consider a better proposal. Sometimes, people want to build bridges worth half a million pounds so that a farmer's divided land can be united, or want to move part of the Dartford-Thurrock bridge, or make some other adaptation because of the location of someone's house. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to make partisan points and betray the fact that he thinks that there will soon be an election.

The Bill is designed to make life easier for ordinary people. If people read the report of the debate, I hope that they will have the confidence to make objections or put their argument at any form of hearing, and find that they are well represented and receive a good hearing.

Mr. Cryer: It would be a good idea to study amendment No. 114 to see whether it is possible to provide for minimal costs for people appearing before the Minister or an inquiry. I realise that there could be a problem, as other similar inquiries could then be said to justify such expenditure. However, it is worth keeping that point in mind when considering the procedure.

I do not agree that various groups should vet the inspector. That would prompt accusations of partiality if the inspector were to be approved by one side. The other side might well argue that, as the inspector had been approved by side A, he or she must be opposed to side B.

There was a great argument over the proposed Aire valley trunk road, when, as a matter of course, the inspector was appointed by the Department of Transport. As a matter of routine, inspectors come from the Department, but people simply did not trust the inspector. That was not because he had exhibited prejudice, but because he came from the Department promoting the proposed trunk road.

I believe that, as a result of that outcry, which occurred in 1978, inspectors are now appointed by the Lord Chancellor's Department so that they have an impartial status. I think that the Minister may well confirm that. If that is not true of the Department of Transport, it should be. People are anxious to ensure that the inspector is not identified with the Department—a valid point.

In 1978 the Department of the Environment of the Labour Government separated the inspectors from the Department as a result of pressure from a local inquiry to which there was bitter opposition. The inquiry was felt to be so prejudiced that it was broken up. When the inspector tried to keep members of the public out of the room, doors were knocked down and the public simply burst in.

That background is relevant to the Bill, as nobody has been appointed under the new legislation. The Minister should ensure, in the limited time left available to him, that inspectors are appointed by the Lord Chancellor's Department so that they are seen to be independent, not as appointees who are subordinate to the Minister's Department.

Mr. McLoughlin: In a trunk road inquiry, the inspectorate is appointed by a panel approved by the Lord Chancellor. For planning inquiries covered by the Bill, inspectors would be chosen from a planning body. In that respect, it is separate from the Department.

Amendment negatived.

Mr. Snape: I beg to move amendment No. 66, in page 6, line 25, after 'shall', insert 'without unreasonable delay'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to consider the following amendments: No. 67, in clause 13, page 7, line 38, after 'shall', insert 'without unreasonable delay'.

No. 68, in clause 13, page 7, line 49, at end insert—

'(2A) If, in the case of an application for the purposes of which an inquiry or hearing is held, the Secretary of State has not given notice of his determination under section 13(1) above before the end of the period of 9 months beginning with the day on which the inquiry or hearing is closed, he shall, if requested to do so by any person to whom notice of the determination must be given under section 14(1) below, specify the date on or before which he expects to give notice of his determination.'.

Mr. Snape: The amendments address the important question of the time scales that are likely to be involved in the determination of an order submitted under the provisions of part I of the Bill. Amendments Nos. 66 and 67 require the Secretary of State to act without unreasonable delay in exercising his powers in relation to requiring a public local inquiry to be held and in reaching a final decision on an order. Amendment No. 68 provides an applicant for an order with the right to demand an indication from the Secretary of State of when he expects to make a decision if the Secretary of State has not done so within nine months of the completion of the inquiry.

The matter of time scales for the determination of such orders was discussed in Committee, and in response to amendments the Under-Secretary said:

"I have concluded that this matter is not suitable for statutory attention. However, I am prepared to consider the publication of guidelines relating to time scales for determining orders . . . But the Secretary of State could not be bound by them".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 14 January 1992; c. 205.]

There is considerable support for the publication of guidelines from groups with an interest in this part of the Bill, and they include the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the Passenger Transport Executive group. It would be helpful if the Minister could say whether he has reached a conclusion on the subject of guidelines.

However, there are serious concerns that guidelines alone will not be enough. The amendments are designed to give added weight to the need to avoid unnecessary delays in the decision-making process without creating problems for the Secretary of State which the Under-Secretary of State argued would arise from the amendments that we considered in Committee.

There are a number of important factors behind the concern of the promoting authorities. Private sector contributions towards the cost of, for example, light rail schemes are increasingly important, particularly in view of Government policies. An applicant for an order would normally seek to have private funding guaranteed before starting the costly exercise of applying for an order. It is essential that private investors know the extent of their commitment, not only in terms of cost, but in terms of how long the commitment would last. Without the certainty of knowing when a decision would be made, it would be difficult to persuade an investor to make a financial commitment in the first place.

The second important reason relates to the changes in relation to blighted property introduced by the Bill. Under the current private Bill procedures and planning procedures, property is blighted only when the Bill is enacted or planning permission is granted. It is recognised that this can cause unfairness, and the Bill provides that land is blighted once an application for an order has been made. This change will impose a considerable financial burden on promoting authorities, such as passenger transport executives, which may have to buy blighted properties long before a decision on an application is made. Speedy decision-making is essential if the financial implications of this change are to be kept to a minimum.

The concern about the timetable for decision making on orders under this Bill is in part a result of authorities' experience with highway orders. A case in Barnsley illustrates the problem.

Mr. Patnick: That is well off beam.

Mr. Snape: It may be, but it is not far from Sheffield.

[Mr. Snape]

Barnsley authority submitted to the Department orders in relation to a road scheme in the borough. What is known as a side roads order was submitted to the Department on 15 July 1991, followed by a compulsory purchase order on 30 September 1991. The last dates for objections to the orders were 9 September and 7 October 1991 respectively. There are a small number of outstanding objections to the orders, and the authority is currently negotiating with those concerned with a view to enabling the objections to be removed.

On 25 November 1991—four months after the first order was submitted—Barnsley borough council received a letter from the Department of Transport raising a number of points of concern about the content and drafting of the orders. The authority replied to these points on 10 December. As of the end of last month, the authority has still received no indication from the Department as to when an inquiry can be held. That was the unsatisfactory position almost six months after the first order had been submitted. This case clearly illustrates the need for these amendments, and I hope that the Under-Secretary will revert to his earlier, more conciliatory, self when he replies.

Mr. Moate: In Committee, I moved an amendment requiring quite precise time limits. It was unsuccessful, but I was grateful to the Under-Secretary, who was fairly helpful, responsive and understanding. I am not in the habit of accusing the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) of being moderate or reasonable, but in this instance his amendments are reasonable and moderate. Essentially, the amendments propose that there should not be any unreasonable delay. That is hardly a great imposition on Departments. I suspect that the Minister agrees that it is reasonable for Departments to be subjected to some sort of discipline. I think he said that he could not accept a precise timetable, but that he would accept the logic of guidelines or target dates.

8.45 pm

One understands the difficulty of placing precise guidelines upon the way that Departments deal with planning applications. Some of them can be immensely complex and difficult and one can see all sorts of legal snares if one tries to apply rigid rules. However, the public, and especially applicants and promoters of schemes, are entitled to speedy replies and to some certainty or some understanding of how long it will take so that they can judge the viability of a project and decide whether it should be backed.

I fully understand why the Minister is logically and sensibly constrained by the whole planning ethos in the Department of the Environment as well as in the Department of Transport. Fundamentally, we are on the right lines, and I hope that we shall emerge from this debate and others with more sensible disciplines and constraints upon local authorities and upon the way in which Ministers and civil servants deal with such matters. I hope that the Minister will be helpful.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) for the way in which he moved the amendments and to my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) for the constructive part that he played in Committee. I have no doubt that the amendments are well intentioned. *[Interruption.]* I hope that no one will prejudge my speech. I cannot comment in detail on the Barnsley case to which the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East referred, but I shall write to him next week and I shall look into the matter of the delay. It is difficult to comment on a case about which one has not been forewarned.

Mr. Cryer: Will the Minister write without unreasonable delay?

Mr. McLoughlin: I will reply in a reasonable time, and that means before next Thursday.

Amendment No. 66 would require the Secretary of State to cause an inquiry to be held without unreasonable delay. Aside from the difficulty of applying appropriate sanctions where the Secretary of State did cause unreasonable delay, the amendment overlooks the fact that the inquiry rules to be made under powers conferred in the Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1971 will contain a pre-inquiry timetable within which the Secretary of State would be expected to work. In practice, the timing of the inquiry is likely to be a matter for the applicant to decide, taking into account the outcome of any negotiations that he wishes to hold with objectors. I do not think it wise to try to force the Secretary of State to arrange an inquiry earlier than the promoter wishes. He may well want to enter negotiations to try to overcome some of the objectors' concerns.

Amendment No. 67 also suffers from the problem of what sanction could helpfully be applied to the Secretary of State if there were unnecessary delay in making or refusing an order following, if necessary, an inquiry or a hearing. As I said in Committee, I am prepared to consider publishing guidelines relating to timetables for determining orders, I suggest that they would be of more practical value than the rather imprecise wording proposed in the amendment. I am prepared to go a little further, and say that we shall almost certainly publish such guidelines; but flexibility will be needed.

Amendment No. 68 has several drawbacks. It appears to be based on the assumption that, by the end of nine months from the conclusion of an inquiry, the Secretary of State would have at least received the inspector's report. That may not be the case, because the inquiry may have been long and complex, and the inspector is likely to require double the length of the inquiry to produce his report. To require the Secretary of State to specify the date on which he expects to give notice of his decision on the order in circumstances when he cannot be sure when the inspector's report will be received, or what it will contain, would be meaningless.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Is the Minister really suggesting that a large number of inquiries will take more than nine months to be completed? If that is so, and if it is likely to take 18 months for the Secretary of State to receive the inspector's report, a long period of blight is probable.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am not saying that; I am saying that that might happen in some cases, and that specifying a figure in the Bill would lead to serious dangers and difficulties. I sincerely hope that the inquiries will not take as long as that. I realise that the aim is to do away with the private Bill procedure, but I must say that, if a nine-month moratorium were imposed on private Bills, the hon.

Gentleman would probably succeed in stopping almost every private Bill from reaching the House for quite some time.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: We do have at least a 12-month block. The amendment merely requires the Secretary of State to give reasons if the process lasts longer than nine months. Normally, if a parliamentary Session lasts for 12 months, a carry-over motion is necessary; and, in a sense, that is the purpose of such a motion—to explain why such a long time has been taken.

Mr. McLoughlin: I accept that, but in such circumstances the Secretary of State would probably specifiy in the order a date several months ahead, to avoid being criticised for failing to meet the date. That would be of no help to anyone. Finally, if the Secretary of State specified a date and that date was missed, what sanction would apply?

A general comment on enforcement may help the House. If the Secretary of State behaves unreasonably in any way, he may be subject to judicial review. He will always have that in mind. The amendments require the Secretary of State to behave reasonably, and that would have to be enforced—again—by judicial review.

I hope that the House will agree that the amendments do not advance the cause espoused not only by the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East, but consistently in Committee by my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate). I hope that the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East will agree to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Snape: I must confess to some disappointment with that reply. We do not appear to have progressed very far since Committee. We cannot lay down a fixed time, because no sanctions are imposed on the Secretary of State. I am not suggesting that the Secretary of State should be dragged out of his office and shot if he fails to make a decision at the proper time; perhaps he should be given a good cuff round the ear from time to time, but nothing more serious. However, we still do not know any more about the guidelines that the Miniser promised us in Committee. He has given us no further information about them tonight.

I have some bad news for the Minister. According to the latest "Newsnight" opinion poll, Labour is leading by 42 per cent. to 38 per cent. Time is slipping away. Unless the guidelines are published very shortly——

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett *rose*——

Mr. McLoughin *rose*——

Mr. Snape: I give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett).

Unless the guidelines are published very shortly, the Minister will not be in a position to do much about them.

Mr. Bennett: On the basis of the good news that he has announced, will my hon. Friend tell us what guidelines he will work to?

Mr. Snape: I knew that I should have given way to the Minister in the first place. Let me correct my mistake immediately.

Mr. McLoughlin: May I caution the hon. Gentleman about relying on BBC "Newsnight" polls? At the time of the by-election in which I became a Member of Parliament, they got it wrong, and they have got it wrong many times since then.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. After that little interlude, let us return to the amendment.

Mr. Snape: I shall bear your strictures in mind, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but, as they have been rejected, the amendments are less interesting than the result of the opinion poll.

We regret the Minister's hesitancy. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) for describing my amendments as moderate and reasonable: I note that he and I have tabled similar amendments relating to a later clause, and, as he will move his first, I may have an opportunity to reciprocate with moderation and helpfulness. We may well get some moderation from the Minister; whether he will be helpful remains to be seen, but, bearing in mind the fact that he has done his best on earlier occasions, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 13

MAKING OR REFUSAL OF ORDERS UNDER SECTION 1 OR 3

Amendment proposed: No. 26, in page 7, line 43, at end insert—

'(1A) Where an application has been made to the Secretary of State under section 6 above and he considers that any of the objects of the order applied for could be achieved by other means, he may on that ground determine not to make the order (but this subsection is without prejudice to subsection (2) below).'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Mr. Cryer: Can the Minister tell us what "other means" he has in mind?

Mr. McLoughlin: That point was raised in Committee. Concern was expressed about a possible flood of applications dealing with matters for which procedures already exist. In particular, some Members feared that unscrupulous applicants might seek to use the new orders to sidestep the established procedures for extinguishing rights of way, where such a proposal was not related to a works matter that belonged to the new procedure. Our proposals were broadly welcomed for that reason.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: I am sure that the Minister is aware that the Rights of Way Review Committee and the Ramblers Association are delighted with the amendment. If I had realised that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) was going to speak, I might have expressed my welcome for the measure, but I thought that we were trying to make progress.

Mr. McLoughlin: That is why I moved the amendment formally.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Snape: I beg to move amendment No. 70, in page 8, line 14, at end insert—

'(5) Where the Secretary of State determining the application has for the time being general responsibility for transport matters he shall, in appropriate circumstances, consult the Secretary of State for the time being having general responsibility for planning matters before doing so.

[Mr. Snape]

(6) The circumstances referred to in subsection (5) above relate in particular to the environmental and land use implications of the proposals.'.

Where an order was being determined by the Secretary of State for Transport, the amendment would require him to consult the Secretary of State for the Environment if the proposal concerned had major environmental or land use implications. The amendment is designed to explore a relatively unclear area in relation to the implementation of part I of the Bill.

Many schemes promoted under the Bill's provisions will have major environmental and land use implications. In some cases—for example, light rail schemes—the proposals could well be part of a transport strategy designed to reduce the environmental impact of people's ever-increasing demand to travel. Such schemes undoubtedly have significant local and environmental impact, particularly in terms of noise and vibration, and also have major implications for land-use patterns.

The draft applications and objections procedure rules circulated by the Department of Transport in Committee rightly emphasised the importance of environmental impact statements in ensuring that sensible decisions are made. There is, however, some concern about the extent to which the Secretary of State for Transport will be responsible for making decisions on major environmental issues. The purpose of the amendment is to secure clarification of the role of the Secretary of State for the Environment in the decision-making process envisaged in the Bill.

9 pm

As ever, the wording of the Bill itself, with its standard reference to an anonymous Secretary of State, is of no great help. The draft regulations refer to the role of the Secretary of State for Transport but, in parentheses, add the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Secretary of State for Energy. The consultation paper on which the provisions of part I of the Bill are based states:

"Decisions on orders which included deemed town planning permission would be made by the Secretary of State for Transport after consultation with the Secretary of State for the Environment (for projects in England) and the Secretary of State for Wales (for projects in Wales)."

The consultation document goes on to say that, where other formal ministerial consents were required—for example, listed building consent—a single public inquiry would examine all the issues, and the decision on the order would be made jointly by the Secretary of State for Transport and the Minister responsible for the other consent. Thus, if, for example, an application were made for listed building consent as part of an order, the Secretary of State for the Environment would be jointly responsible for deciding whether the order should be confirmed.

The Under-Secretary made a similar point in Committee when he said:

"Where it is the Secretary of State for Transport who is responsible for deciding on an application, he will naturally want to consult the Secretary of State for the Environment about the planning implications of a scheme. That Department holds the relevant expertise in that area and it is unthinkable that it would not be consulted."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 14 Janaury 1992; c. 208.]

In order to clarify what the Minister said on that occasion, as well as this whole area, it would be extremely helpful if the Under-Secretary were to say in what circumstances the Secretary of State for Transport will be responsible for making the decision about an application, and when other Ministers will have primary responsibility.

It would be helpful if he were to indicate also in what circumstances the Government envisage decisions being taken jointly by the Secretary of State for Transport and the Secretary of State for the Environment. Are the circumstances confined to those in which listed building consent is involved, as I have already set out?

Finally, in what cases will the Secretary of State for Transport consult the Secretary of State for the Environment, what form will the consultation take, and will the existence and the outcome of consultations be made public?

Mr. McLoughlin: I have no quarrel with the basic intention behind this amendment, but it is another attempt to introduce on to the face of the Bill rigid procedures that are undesirable and inappropriate. The references throughout the Bill to "Secretary of State" without further identification is deliberate. It is a term that is unlikely to be affected by changes in ministerial responsibilities. It takes into account—as this amendment does not—the fact that the relevant Secretary of State will not always be the Minister in charge of a Department that has general transport responsibilities.

For example, tidal energy barrages will be determined by the Secretary of State for Energy or, in Wales, by the Secretary of State for Wales, and inland waterway schemes by the Secretary of State for the Environment. The term also ignores the planning responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Wales for developments in Wales. It is within the political memories of most of us—including the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East, (Mr. Snape) I am sure —that the Department of Transport and the Department of the Environment were once the same and that for some years the former did not encompass maritime and aviation matters.

We accept that the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Secretary of State for Wales should be consulted about every draft order submitted under clause 1 or 3 involving planning issues that would be determined by the Secretary of State for Transport or by the Secretary of State for Energy.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Is the Minister really saying that the Secretaries of State will be interchangeable? If so, is it right to assume that a Secretary of State will not be the Minister to make the decision in respect of a scheme in his own constituency?

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman may rest assured that, in government, that sort of situation is well protected. There are very clear guidelines. No Minister —whether a Secretary of State or a junior Minister— would involve himself in matters that directly affected his constituency.

I can give the House an assurance that consultations such as I have referred to would take place. If hon. Members need further evidence of our good intentions, they should be aware, first, that, under the application rules, the local planning authorities will be statutory consultees, and copies of every application, with supporting documents, will have to be deposited with every local authority in whose area the proposed development is situated. Secondly, applicants will have to produce an environmental statement for every scheme

except the very smallest, and this will be available for public inspection. If policy issues arise on these documents, it is to the Secretary of State for the Environment or the Secretary of State for Wales that we shall turn for guidance.

With those assurances, I ask the Opposition to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Snape: I confess to a sense of disappointment. The Under-Secretary congratulates me on the moderation of my amendments or, at least, gives an implicit nod to the moderation with which I move them, yet he says that they are not necessary. If an anonymous Secretary of State is mentioned in the Bill, it is not clear, not only in law but to interested parties who may well be, or wish to be, involved in a local planning inquiry or in direct representations, what Secretary of State is concerned. If the hon. Gentleman cannot accept my amendments, he might think about speaking to the parliamentary draftsmen about using the words "the appropriate Secretary of State"—that is, the appropriate Secretary of State depending on the matters before that currently anonymous person.

Once again, in the interests of amity in these proceedings, I beg to ask leave, though somewhat reluctantly on this occasion, to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 15

CONCURRENT PROCEEDINGS

Amendments made: No. 27, in page 9, line 7, leave out 'or permission' and insert ', permission or licence'.

No. 28, in page 9, line 11, leave out from 'relates' to end of line 13 and insert—

'(a) the procedure for obtaining, or otherwise relating to, the consent, permission, licence, order or confirmation, and

(b) the procedure relating to the application made under section 6 above,

are wholly or partly assimilated (and in particular that proceedings relating to the one may be held concurrently with proceedings relating to the other)'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Clause 16

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING

Mr. Moate: I beg to move amendment No. 29, in page 9, leave out lines 29 to 33 and insert—

'(2A) Subject to subsections (2B) and (2C), planning permission shall be deemed to be granted for development for which provision is made by an order under section 1 or 3 of the Transport and Works Act 1992.

(2B) Development is not permitted by subsection (2A) if it consists of or includes—

(a) the erection, construction, alteration or extension of any building, bridge, aquaduct, pier or dam, or

(b) the formation, laying out or alteration of a means of access to any highway used by vehicular traffic,

unless the prior approval of the detailed plans and specifications of the appropriate authority is first obtained.

(2C) The prior approval referred to in subsection (2B) is not to be refused by the appropriate authority nor are conditions to be imposed unless they are satisfied that—

(a) the development (other than the provision of or works carried out to a dam) ought to be and could reasonably to be carried out elsewhere on the land, or

(b) the design or external appearance of any building, bridge, aquaduct, pier or dam would injure the amenity of the neighbourhood and is reasonably capable of modification to avoid such injury.

(2D) In subsections (2B) and (2C) "appropriate authority" means—

(a) in Greater London or a metropolitan county, the local planning authority,

(b) in a National Park, outside a metropolitan county, the county planning authority, and

(c) in any other case, the district planning authority.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 69, in page 9, line 33, at end insert—

'(1A) Part 11 of Schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988 shall apply to an order made under section 1 above as if it were an order made under section 14 or 16 of the Harbours Act 1964.'.

Mr. Moate: The amendment provides that, once an order under clause 1 or clause 3 is made, the development for which the order provides would have the benefit of deemed planning permission in the same way as is the case for development authorised by a private Bill at the present time or by a harbour revision order. The provision made by the amendment is in exactly the same terms as part II of the 1988 order. Therefore, it provides exactly the same planning safeguards as those that currently apply in the case of development authorised by private Bills or harbour revision orders.

This question was considered in some respects in Committee and has been the subject of subsequent representations and discussions with the Minister. I put on record my appreciation of the way in which the Minister received representations and has endeavoured to meet these anxieties. However, I am still extremely worried, as I think others are, about the way that the Bill might work in practice with regard to a number of orders. Efforts have been made to satisfy those concerned that there is no cause for anxiety, but people are still very anxious because they believe that the Bill will not work in the way that it is intended to work.

My hon. Friend knows that I regard the present private Bill procedure as totally unsatisfactory in many respects, particularly for railway matters. The new procedure will be very much better. However, at the moment, the private Bill procedure means that, once all the parliamentary hurdles have been overcome and a Bill becomes an Act, there is certainty about planning permission. Our concern is that under the new proposals the same certainty will not apply once an order has been made.

I do not believe for one moment that the Minister, or anybody else, wants to cause further procedural delays, but my worry is that, as the Bill stands, it may be possible for an order to be made by the Secretary of State and for there then to be another planning procedure, another inquiry, which could cause considerable delay. The very fear of that second bite at the cherry could worry promoters and cause great concern and indecision about whether to proceed with a certain project.

As it stands, the Bill empowers the Secretary of State only to direct that planning permission shall be deemed to have been granted. However, the terms on which planning permission is granted are left entirely to the Secretary of State, in contrast to the present planning rules.

I understand that the intention to leave it in this optional form is not designed to make life difficult for

[Mr. Moate]

British Rail or any other promoter: it is intended to be helpful. None the less, the fact remains that the Secretary of State has the option, if he so wishes, not to grant full planning permission. If we assume that normal planning permission would be granted at the same time as the order is made, that could happen only if—this is another anxiety—the promoters had submitted all the detailed design work so that the whole matter could be considered at the same time.

That is a risky process. If the very principle is in doubt, the promoter is risking enormous investment in planning all the gradients, all the work on the bridges, the design work and the like for a scheme about which there is some element of doubt.

We are then told that that is not necessarily what will happen. The promoters need only seek outline planning permission for the details to be resolved thereafter, perhaps with the local planning authority. That presents a problem because, on a controversial scheme, the local planning authority could make unreasonable demands and, in effect, call for another planning process to deal with all the details. We would then have had one order-making procedure, perhaps involving a public inquiry, determined by the Secretary of State, followed by another planning and consideration process.

Nobody wants the procedure to be drawn out. We want it to be streamlined and efficient. No one is suggesting that the public and the planning authorities should not have full input into the proceedings. However, it is paramount that it is wrapped up in one procedure. My concern is that, as the Bill is drafted, it might now always work that way.

I am satisfied that it is the intention of my hon. Friend the Minister and the planning authorities that it should be done in one procedure, but we cannot be certain that the statute would always be followed in that way. It is reasonable to place in the legislation the certainty that is currently in the private Bill procedure. All one is asking is that planning permission shall be deemed granted once an order has been approved. All that means is that, before making an order, the Secretary of State must go through all planning considerations and take into account all the representations and the detailed and outlined work. British Rail is the body most concerned about this, but it could be any body. Any promoters need to know that they can go ahead with certainty.

I hope that my hon. Friend can meet those anxieties and accept my amendment or that tabled by the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), which has the same result.

Mr. Snape: At the risk of extending even further this mutual admiration society, I must congratulate the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) on the content of his amendment and the way in which it was moved. I hope that I do not depart too much from the attitude of concensus if I say that amendment No. 69 is even better than his amendment, but I think that his is pretty good. I hope that the Minister can accept the principle behind both amendments and the chapter and verse of one.

Clause 16(1) as drafted would empower the Secretary of State on making an order under clause 1 relating to railway works and so on to direct that planning permission be granted subject to any conditions that he may specify. That is different from the position that obtains now under the private Bill procedure, which we are supposed to be reforming or improving, or under a harbour revision order.

At present, if Parliament agrees a scheme or a harbour order is approved, there is deemed planning permission for the scheme, subject to reservation of detailed matters under part II of schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Development) Order 1988. Reserved matters to be dealt with by the local planning authority would consist of the detailed designs of erections or extensions of buildings, bridges or the formation or alteration of a means of access by any highway used by vehicular traffic. The local planning authority could not refuse such detailed matters unless it was satisfied that the development could be carried out elsewhere on the land authorised for the works or that the design or external appearance of the buildings would injure the amenity of the neighbourhood and could be reasonably modified.

At present, the promoter of a scheme will not have to consider the planning side as a separate and distinct application from the overall consideration of the merits of the scheme. Planning issues such as environmental assessment and the scheme's relationship to local authorities' local plans and structure plans are all to be considered. Essentially, an overview is taken of the total project.

9.15 pm

In Committee, the Minister stated in column 229 of the report of the proceedings that planning merit should be considered on a case-by-case basis, which would enable the necessary planning conditions attached to the order to be tailored to suit a particular case and he said that matters such as the design details of a building or bridge could be approved by the Secretary of State. Furthermore, he stated that, in some cases, planning permission would not be required or might already have been granted.

Under the draft rules for the application for orders, there will have to be a prior notification of any scheme to the local authority and a certificate from the local authority about the status of the scheme in relation to the structure or local plan. All the various planning issues will be considered at a public inquiry, where one is held, as opposed to being considered under the private Bill procedure as at present.

However, there seems to be no justification from the Government of why there has to be an added complication in having a specific planning application before the Secretary of State. All the usual planning material will come before the inspector at the inquiry and the promoter will have provided sufficient detail to prepare the necessary plans and sections and for a clear description of the works. However, he will not necessarily have the design of buildings completed to the finest degree. Although he may have a pretty clear idea of the overall scheme, he may wish to hold back on further commitments of staff resources on a very detailed design until he or she has received the overall approval—that is, precise formation of station shelters or station buildings, if we are to use British Rail as an example.

If planning permission has already been granted by a local planning authority or it is not required, there is no particular planning issue for the Secretary of State to consider, and in such a case, the deemed planning permission provision need not apply. Where required, however, the present arrangements should apply.

In essence, while the same substantive issues are to be considered under the present and proposed procedure, the new procedure creates an unnecessary further application and complication. It gives complete control to the Secretary of State even on the detailed matters which are much more likely to be of great interest to, and, indeed, considered with greater awareness by, the local planning authority. In short, the Minister has not made a clear case for changing the present arrangements or planning procedures which have worked satisfactorily and are extremely clear and simple.

In tabling amendment No. 29, the hon. Member for Faversham sought the reintroduction of the present planning arrangement, but our amendment is framed in such a way that it equates with what the Government even now still propose for harbour orders—a deemed permission procedure. It is illogical, to say the least, that the deemed permission can apply only to harbour works, not railway works.

Again, I return to the central point of the Bill. It is supposed to simplify the procedure. If amendment No. 29 —or amendment No. 69—is accepted, it will do so. If not, it will further and unnecessarily complicate the procedure.

Mr. Cryer: I support my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) and the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate). Amendment No. 29 is similar to amendment No. 69. It provides for safeguards for major works so that local authorities have some planning consent, but allows the planning procedure to be integrated into the making of the orders. That is very important because otherwise it could lead to British Rail, for example, being involved in significant costs in the preparation of designs and plans when development might be delayed or might come to nought.

Amendment No. 29 deals with major works such as

"the erection, construction, alteration or extension of any building, bridge, aqueduct, pier or dam"

and various means of access to highways which should be the prerogative of the local authority. This is not an erosion of local authority planning rights—it ensures merely that the planning procedure is not dealt with as an entirely separate matter so that expenditure is not made needlessly by a public body which is already very short of money for any new development. Therefore, I hope that the Minister will be able to accept either amendment, as the issue has cross-party support.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) and to the hon. Members for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape). As my hon. Friend said, I also met him a short time ago to discuss the issue behind the amendments. I shall try to explain why I do not support the idea of a General Development Order approach. I do not agree that a convincing case has been made for amending the Bill. We considered adopting the General Development Order approach, but concluded that section 90 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 offered the most flexibility both to applicants and to the Secretary of State in determining orders. I shall explain why.

First, promoters will be able, if they wish, to make separate applications for planning approval to the local planning authority. Such a facility was proposed in the Government's consultation paper, "Private Bills and New Procedures", on the basis that applicants should be allowed the option of applying separately for planning permission. For example, the applicant may already have obtained planning consent, or may have been advised by the local planning authority that planning permission was not required when applying for a works order. That frequently occurs on preserved railway schemes which are subject to light railway orders.

The GDO approach, involving automatic planning permission to be deemed to be granted with the order, would encourage objectors to raise planning issues at the local inquiry, which under the section 90 approach the inspector would be able to disallow. The amendment could therefore seriously prejudice the interests of certain applicants, and result in two planning determinations on the same development.

Secondly, the procedure enables designs and specifications to be prepared in sufficient detail for planning consent to be deemed to be granted without the need for an application to obtain separate planning permission from the local planning authority. Perhaps, on very large schemes, the promoter would not want to risk heavy detailed design costs until an order had been made, but on smaller projects, where the promoter could be reasonably confident that the order would be authorised without significant amendment, it might be worth while for detailed designs to be submitted with the draft order, as that would save the time that would be spent in going separately to the local planning authority. The decision, however, would rest entirely with the applicant. If he wanted to adopt an arrangement on design work similar to that provided for in the General Development Order, he would be able to do so.

Finally, the Secretary of State has greater freedom on the conditions that he wishes to attach to a particular order. That might help the applicant, without prejudicing the position of the objector. For example, the Secretary of State might restrict the categories of construction works which need to be subject to separate planning consent to a shorter list than that contained in the GDO, or he might impose tougher conditions on the grounds on which the local planning authority might object to the detailed designs. Of course, much would depend on the amount of information provided about the scheme with the draft order. Consequently, the question whether outline or full planning permission was deemed to be granted would have to be considered case by case. But as the applicant would be in the driving seat concerning the level of detailed designs that he provided with an order, I cannot see how he could be prejudiced by the approach we have adopted.

Mr. Moate: I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend. I understand what he is saying now, but he said earlier that on a larger scheme an applicant—a promoter—might wish simply to lodge outline information, because he would not wish to go to the expense of providing extensive design work until he was more sure that the scheme would be approved. It is important to establish whether my hon. Friend accepts that, in those circumstances, there would have to be a subsequent planning procedure, which would incur further delay and costs.

Mr. McLoughlin: I intend to deal with that point, and I hope that my hon. Friend will be happy—or, if not happy, at least content—with my answer.

It has also been suggested that, as the deemed planning permission would not be automatic, and the power in

[Mr. McLoughlin]

clause 16 is discretionary, the applicant could not be certain that the permission would be granted with the order. The power is discretionary rather than mandatory because, as I have said, some applications will not require planning permission. Although that means that the Secretary of State could, in theory, withhold or delay deemed planning consent, one has to ask why he would want to do so.

The planning merits are likely to be such an important and integral aspect of the approval process where development is involved that it is scarcely conceivable that the Secretary of State would approve an order without at the same time granting planning permission. The promoter would be bound to question the decision of the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of State would have to provide reasons. Such a decision would probably be unlawful, because it would be unreasonable, and no reasonable Secretary of State would have made it. We come back again to the position of a possible judicial review.

Amendment No. 69 would tie the orders to harbour orders. As we shall see when we come to amendment No. 123, harbour provision orders sometimes disapply the GDO because it is too inflexible. It enables them to deal with planning permissions more sensitively. I suspect that, if we were beginning again, we might use the provisions in clause 16 for harbours too.

For those who remain sceptical, I can give an unqualified assurance that, on all applications in which planning permission is sought as part of an order, the Secretary of State would always make a determination on the works order and deemed planning permission at the same time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham suggested that the promoters of orders, such as British Rail, would not want to commit expensive design resources before the order was determined, and so would only be able to obtain outline planning permission. That would in turn leave them at the mercy of local planning authorities. British Rail, for example, would have to go to such an authority to obtain detailed planning permission. That may be true, but the same applies under the General Development Order. The local authority could refuse planning permission to the works, such as bridges, excluded from the permitted development, or could impose conditions on the means of access to the site.

It is a moot point whether certain other conditions, such as the imposition of working hours and noise insulation measures, which are not imposed under the GDO, should apply to railway developments. Those matters would almost certainly be raised at a local inquiry, and the Secretary of State would want to ensure that they were dealt with properly before approving the order. In any event, not all promoters would want to leave the detailed design for approval to the local authority. Some will see the advantage of going for detailed planning approval as part of the order and thus avoiding the need to apply separately to the local authority.

Our approach gives flexibility which the GDO does not. I hope that the reassurances that I have given my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Opposition Members show that our approach is the most flexible and does not disadvantage either promoters or objectors. I hope that my hon. Friend will not press the amendment.

Mr. Moate: By leave of the House, I shall reply to the debate.

Some of us find ourselves in some difficulty. The Minister's arguments are not unfamiliar and I am sure that they are backed by considerable expertise and by considerable authority. However, there are authoritative and expert views—I know that from many years of experience, especially of British Rail—which are sceptical about whether matters will work as my hon. Friend has said. We do not pretend to be planning lawyers and it is especially difficult to make precise judgments about what my hon. Friend has said. I hope that he understands that there is genuine concern that matters will not necessarily work in the way that he has described.

I am not sure what I am asking my hon. Friend to do. Without disrespect to the eminent consultant who has, no doubt, advised him so far, will my hon. Friend take a second opinion? That is not an unreasonable thing to do, because there is genuine concern. In some ways, my hon. Friend's words on the record are helpful. He said that the Secretary of State would "always" make a determination. As a statement on the record, that is helpful, but it does not bind my hon. Friend's successors and it is not in the statute. Sometimes the promoters could be at the mercy of a local authority after they have gone through all the previous procedures, so there is some alarm.

I do not feel that we can press the matter further at present. It is right that we should have registered concern and I urge my hon. Friend to get others to have another look at the issue to see whether there is some way in which to import certainty into the procedures so that we can be reasonably certain that at all times there is one procedure, not two, and that promoters are able to put forward a proposal with the certainty that there will not be undue expense.

That would be in the interests, especially for railways, of speedy construction and sensible streamlined planning procedures, coupled with fairer opportunities for public representation. I hope that my hon. Friend will look again at the proposal before the Bill goes to the other place. If he will do that, I am happy not to press the amendment.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 19

COAST PROTECTION ACT 1949

Amendment made: No. 30, in page 10, line 21, leave out 'at the end' and insert 'after paragraph (g)'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Clause 23

EXERCISE OF SECRETARY OF STATE'S FUNCTIONS BY APPOINTED PERSON

Amendments made: No. 32 in page 11, line 36, after '(3)', insert

'Subject to subsection (3A) below,'.

No. 33, in page 11, line 47, at end insert—

'(3A) An order made on an application dealt with by a person appointed under this section shall not authorise the compulsory acquisition of land, or the compulsory creation or extinguishment of rights over land (including rights of navigation over water).'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Mr. McLoughlin: I beg to move amendment No. 34, in page 12, line 11, at end insert—

'(5A) If the Secretary of State exercises the power conferred on him by subsection (5)(a) above, he shall give reasons to the appointed person for revoking his appointment.'.

It might help if I make a few comments on amendment No. 34. It requires the Secretary of State to give a reason to the appointed person if his or her appointment is to be revoked. The amendment stops short of publication, because it is possible that the appointment is being revoked for reasons that that person would not want to be divulged. For example, it might be on health grounds or for some other personal reasons which should not be made public. I think, however, that this amendment meets the spirit of the one tabled in Committee by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), and I hope that the House will support it.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 41

APPROVAL OF WORKS, PLANT AND EQUIPMENT

Amendment proposed, No. 87, in page 21, line 28, at end insert

'and other periods of use before sufficient information is available for a decision to be made on an application for approval'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

9.30 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This amendment is concerned with testing. I note that we have passed over part II, chapter I, which has a few clauses about a different sort of testing, to which it might be possible to return on Third Reading.

Amendment agreed to.

Schedule 2

STOPPING UP AND DIVERSION OF RAIL CROSSINGS

Amendment proposed, No. 38, in page 34, line 34, after 'to', insert '(a)'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 39, Government amendment No. 7, in page 34, line 35, leave out from 'practicable' to end and insert

'either—

(a) to improve the safety of the public at the crossing; or

(b) to divert the path or way; or

(c) to replace the crossing with a bridge or tunnel.'.

No. 8, in page 34, line 40, at end insert

'and showing the alternative highways which run between the ends of that part of the path or way being stopped up'.

No. 9, in page 34, line 40, at end insert—

'(5A) Where an order made under this section or under section 119A below has been confirmed, the highway authority may erect, and maintain for a period not exceeding ten years, such signs as it considers expedient for informing the public of the closure of the crossing of the railway line; and, before making an order under his section or section 119A below at the request of a railway operator, a council may require the operator to enter into an agreement with them or with the highway authority to defray, or to make such contribution as may be specified in the agreement towards, the expenses incurred by the highway authority in providing and maintaining such signs.'.

Government amendments Nos. 40 to 42.

No. 11, in page 35, line 26, leave out from 'practicable' to end and insert

'either—

(a) to improve the safety of the public at the crossing; or

(b) to replace the crossing with a bridge or tunnel.'.

No. 12, in page 35, line 34, at end insert,

'and which is substantially as safe and convenient to the public'.

Government amendments Nos. 44 to 45.

Mr. Fearn: I refer to amendments Nos. 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12. In Committee, on 21 January the Minister said that he accepted the principle of what was then the last part of new clause 1. That would enable the Secretary of State to direct the railways board to provide a tunnel or bridge if he or she believed that there was no other way of making the crossing safe. The Minister also stated that grants would be given to ensure that crossings were as safe as possible. I welcome both statements. However, the Minister also said:

"It is important that costs be kept low".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A,* 21 January 1992; c. 294.]

We should recognise that, above all else, our amendment deals with safety. I do not believe that any expense should be spared to make crossings as safe as possible, especially when protecting human life. However, the years of continuous neglect under Governments of differing complexions will make it difficult to meet all safety costs in one go. Nevertheless, that should not be an excuse not to attempt any improvement.

An additional benefit to be gained from my amendment is that it specifically lists alternatives to closure of a path. I further believe that pedestrians' rights should be considered equally in regard to road and rail. The amendment would put the rights of pedestrians affected by road and rail alterations on an equal footing. In Committee, the Minister stated that the Government would table their own amendment on the issue, but I hope that he is willing to accept my amendment in the belief that it is a reasonable step forward which may save lives.

Amendment No. 8 aims to improve security and scrutiny of any rail extinguishment order. The Bill requires that the plan should show the path which is being stopped up. The amendment would ensure that users could clearly see what alternative routes would have to be used if the order was confirmed. The measure would enable potential footpath users to pass judgment on the relative safety and convenience of alternatives to the existing plan.

Support for any measure that places information in the hands of local people should be maintained within the House. That is the purpose behind the amendment, and it is my aim that it should be achieved at no cost. I look forward to the Minister's reply.

Amendments Nos. 11 and 12 deal with safety. As all five amendments that I have mentioned deal with safety, perhaps the Minister will spend some time telling us what we can conclude from the fact that safety is not mentioned that often and is not mentioned in his amendment.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: I also support the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) and me. They have been sent in by the Ramblers Association. I am aware that the Minister has given some assurances to the rights of way review committee that he will try to meet many of its points by means of regulations. I hope that he will reinforce those assurances when he replies and will deal with at least some of the specific problems.

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

First, where a closure takes place and an alternative route is proposed, it is important that local people know what the alternative is. They must be able to examine it and see whether it uses roads. We must ensure that, when we divert people away from a dangerous railway level crossing, we do not simply divert them to a section of dangerous road where there is equal hazard. It is important that local people know not only that the crossing will be closed but what the alternative will be. If a closure is approved, it is important that proper signs are provided to show that the route has been closed and the alternative route.

The Minister will realise that many people who go out walking use ordnance survey maps. Although it would be nice if maps were kept up to date, that is not always the practice. Today I walked down to the London map centre near Victoria and looked through three or four of the maps on sale. I looked especially at the outdoor leisure map for the Conwy valley. It is based on a map that was produced in a provisional series for the 1920s. Major revisions have been made since, but some of the footpaths go back to that era. The forestry activities in the area have made some of the paths impossible to follow. If someone is working with a map which may be five, six or more years out of date in an area where a level crossing has been closed and an alternative route provided, it is important that the route is clearly described.

I hope that the Minister will spell out the duties on a local authority which approves a closure to ensure that there are adequate signs to show that the crossing has been closed. Obviously, a crossing will be closed only if it is dangerous, so it is important that people do not use it and that the alternative is clearly signed and marked. I hope that the Minister can give that assurance and confirm that, at a further meeting with the Rights of Way Review Committee, he will give assurances that the regulations will meet the points that the committee has made.

Mr. McLoughlin: If I may begin with the last point first, I assure the hon. Gentleman that I will meet the Rights of Way Review Committee and try to meet any outstanding points.

The Government amendments seek to deal with concerns raised in Committee and in our consultations with the rights of way review committee that the provisions in schedule 2 on rail crossing extinguishment and diversion orders did not include a power enabling councils to recover the costs of erecting any signs or barriers in connection with the orders.

Part of amendment No. 39 and amendment No. 42 require the council or the Secretary of State to take into account arrangements for the placing and maintaining of appropriate signs and barriers when confirming a rail crossing extinguishment or diversion order. The second part of amendment No. 39 and amendment No. 44 enable the council to require the railway operator to enter into an agreement to recover in part or in whole the cost of erecting and maintaining barriers and signs before making a rail crossing extinguishment or diversion order.

The enabling powers for erecting signs on public paths and ways are contained in the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. Draft regulations prescribing the size, colour and nature of the signs will be prepared. In the case of an extinguishment order, the intention is that a sign capable of being retained for a period of 10 years will be placed at the intersection of the extinguished path or way and other paths or ways warning users that the path or way shown on the ordnance survey map has been closed.

The other amendments tabled by my right hon. and learned Friend are consequential tidying up provisions.

I commend the amendments to the House. They have the support of the Rights of Way Review Committee, and I am sure that they will be of real practical value when paths or ways crossing railways have to be stopped up or diverted on safety grounds.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) should not get too carried away because safety measures are not mentioned in the Bill. The ethos underlying it is to try to help and to have proper regard for safety matters. He makes too much of saying that safety is not on the face of the Bill.

I hope that Opposition Members will not press amendment No. 9, on the basis that it is less comprehensive than ours. It does not, for example, include the provision of barriers.

Turning to the other amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) and the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish, amendments Nos. 7 and 11 seek to qualify the circumstances which the council and the Secretary of State should take into account in confirming, respectively, unopposed and opposed orders. We accept that the practicability of diverting a crossing rather than simply stopping it up should be considered, as should the possibility of replacing the crossing with a bridge or underpass.

On the other hand, the term

"improving the safety of the public at the crossing"

suggests that measures might be taken which, although an improvement, still did not make the cross safe for use. We think that that would be an unacceptable watering down of the safety provisions in the Bill. Our view, more broadly, is that the amendments would prevent the Secretary of State from taking into account other circumstances which may be relevant to the decision. That cannot be right.

I have some sympathy for the intention behind amendment No. 8, but we think that that could be dealt with in the regulations which would be made, prescribing the information which the railway operator would have to provide with his request for a rail crossing order. We shall come to that when we debate amendment No. 72.

Amendment No. 12 is good in parts. We agree that the new point of termination of a diverted path or way should be safe for use by the public. That would be considered by the council and the Secretary of State in deciding whether to confirm a rail crossing diversion order. Neither authority would be prepared to confirm a diversion order where the diverted path or way was demonstrably unsafe.

However, it might be reasonable for a rail crossing diversion order to be confirmed where the point of termination of the path or way was not substantially as convenient to the public. Where safety is involved, a less convenient right of way might be more acceptable to the path users than the loss of the right of way altogether—which might be the only other practicable option. The Secretary of State or the council must have regard to the relative convenience of the diverted path or way, and would turn away an order where the diversion was so inconvenient as not to offer a reasonable alternative, but those matters are best left to guidelines rather than

prescription in the primary legislation. We have covered that, but I give an undertaking to meet the Rights of Way Review Committee if there are other concerns. We have already met the committee, and the amendments that we have tabled are a result of those meetings.

I hope that the hon. Member will feel able not to press his amendment.

Mr. Fearn: The Minister has given reassurances, and he mentioned the word "safety" twice, so I shall withdraw the amendments in my name.

Mr. Speaker: We do not need the pleasure of a withdrawal.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 39 in page 34, line 35, at end insert

', and

(b) what arrangements have been made for ensuring that, if the order is confirmed, any appropriate barriers and signs are erected and maintained.

(4A) Before determining to make a rail crossing extinguishment order on the representations of the operator of the railway crossed by the path or way, the council may require him to enter into an agreement with them to defray, or to make such contribution as may be specified in the agreement towards, any expenses which the council may incur in connection with the erection or maintenance of barriers and signs.'.

No. 40, in page 34, line 44, after 'section', insert

'—

"operator", in relation to a railway, means any person carrying on an undertaking which includes maintaining the permanent way;'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: I beg to move amendment No. 10, in page 34, line 44, leave out from 'railway' to end of line 46 and insert 'does not include tramway'.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider amendment No. 13, in page 36, lin 32, leave out from 'railway' to end of line 34 and insert 'does not include tramway'.

Mr. Bennett: Why does the Minister have to apply the proposals for crossings to tramways? My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) described graphically the problems for the drivers of high-speed trains and the horror that they could experience if they were involved in an accident on a level crossing. We can all understand that there is a balance between the requirements of safety and the problems that they present for the railway on main lines, with trains travelling at considerable speeds. How does he envisage the same problems applying to a tramway, as in most instances at some time or other they will run through a town centre? Why is it necessary to consider the closure of footpath crossings on tramways?

Mr. McLoughlin: I agree with the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) that the provisions in schedule 2 apply mainly, if not wholly, to railways. There are, for the moment, only two tramways in England and Wales operating passenger services—Blackpool and Great Orme—but in both cases I am told, there are substantial lengths which do not run on the street. The Manchester metro and other new light rail systems will also include sections of segregated tramway. It is possible therefore that a path or way crossing a tramway operated off street could become unsafe.

For example, a new caravan park might result in increased use by people unfamiliar with the tramway and it might be necessary to stop up or divert the crossing on safety grounds. Although I agree, therefore, that the provisions are basically there for railway crossings, we cannot rule out entirely the need to use them for tramways, and because of the important public safety considerations, this provision must be comprehensive. I hope that I have given the reassurance that the hon. Gentleman requires.

9.45 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: The Minister certainly has not. I do not remember which hon. Member gave a long reminiscence in Committee about travelling on the Great Orme tramway.

Mr. Snape: It was me.

Mr. Bennett: I am sorry that I failed to credit my hon. Friend.

If the Minister had experience of that tramway, he would realise that it was not driven at such great speeds that it was not safe to walk across the track. I can understand that there are circumstances in which it is not safe to be in front of a Blackpool tram, but that is only on the carriageway. It seems odd to say that people can walk to and fro on the carriageway, but if the trams run on a small section that is not on the carriageway, people cannot walk across that. That is totally illogical and inconsistent.

The Minister has asked about new circumstances. I hope that the new Greater Manchester tramway system will be operating by the end of the month. Sections of that line towards Altrincham and Bury use what were railway lines, which have been downgraded for trams. I cannot envisage a situation in which trams will travel so fast along that section of track that the footpath will have to be closed, yet on other parts of the route, the same trams will run along carriageways in which people will be free to walk backwards and forwards across a track without any difficulty.

If the Minister wants to reassure ramblers and others that he is not setting out to close footpaths on a wholesale basis, which is totally unnecessary, it would be far better for him to make one more concession and accept the amendment. I know that he is not keen to have amendments moved in the House of Lords or to delay the progress of the Bill, but I am tempted to push this to a vote.

Amendment negatived.

Amendments made: No. 41, in page 35, line 25, after 'to', insert—

'(a)'.

No. 42, in page 35, line 26, at end insert

', and

(b) what arrangements have been made for ensuring that, if the order is confirmed, any appropriate barriers and signs are erected and maintained.'.

No. 43, in page 35, line 34, at end insert—

'( ) A rail crossing diversion order may make provision requiring the operator of the railway to maintain all or part of the footpath or bridleway created by the order.'.

No. 44, in page 35, line 48, at end insert—

'(aa) any expenses which the council may incur in connection with the erection of maintenance of barriers and signs;'.

No. 45, in page 35, line 52, leave out 'or'.

No. 71, in page 37, line 2, leave out 'written'.

No. 72, in page 37, line 4, after 'railway', insert—

[Mr. Bennett]

'(aa) the request is in such form and gives such particulars as are prescribed by regulations made by the Secretary of State'.

No. 73, in page 37, line 40, at end insert—

'7A. In section 325 (provisions as to regulations, schemes and orders) in subsection (2)(a), after the word "section", there shall be inserted the words "120(3A) or".'.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Clause 59

HARBOURS

Amendment made: No. 46, in page 29, line 21, at end insert—

'(3) In section 35 of the Coast Protection Act 1949 (which excepts certain operations from the requirement to obtain the Secretary of State's consent under section 34) in subsection (1) there shall be added after paragraph (h)—

"(i) any operations authorised by an order under section 14 or 16 of the Harbours Act 1964.".'. —*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Schedule 3

AMENDMENT OF HARBOURS ACT 1964

Mr. Spearing: I beg to move amendment No. 122, in page 38, leave out lines 32 and 33.

Schedule 3 hangs on clause 59 and relates to an entirely different matter. We have shifted from tramways and railways to the much more ancient travel facility—the harbour. There are about 600 of them around our coast and many are relatively small. Most harbours were important to their regions years ago, but the change in shipping techniques has often left them to inshore fishing or perhaps leisure use.

The powers with which I am concerned are contained in schedule 3. The Bill transforms section 14 of the Harbours Act 1964, which enabled the then Minister of Transport to change harbour constitutions. Many of those harbours were entreched in Acts of Parliament of long ago. Some small ports obtained their own Acts of Parliament, many of them unique and highly localised, with a good deal of local loyalty and concern.

There was some contoversy over the passing of section 14 because it allowed the then Minister to change the constitution of those harbour boards by statutory instrument, even when those harbours had been established by an Act of Parliament. The provision was not confined to small harbours. The constitution of the Port of London Authority engaged the House in many debates between 1906 and 1910. Two or three long Second Reading debates took place on the establishment of the Port of London Authority. Its constitution was changed more or less in secret overnight by a statutory instrument. Therefore, in the past, harbour revision orders have not been used just for small ports.

Schedule 3 changes those powers. It is legislation by reference to section 14 and it enables the Secretary of State to issue a statutory instrument that closes part of the harbour, reduces the facilities available in a harbour, or disposes of property not required for the purposes of a harbour. As I said in Committee, closure of part of a harbour could mean the closure of as much as 80 or 90 per cent. It could effectively close 100 per cent. of a harbour.

Indeed, it could do much more, because schedule 3, paragraph 1(4)(c) states:

"for the words 'repealing and amending' there shall be substituted the words 'excluding or modifying any provision of any Act or of any instrument made under any Act (including this Act) and for repealing'.".

In other words, it gives the Minister the power to modify not just harbour Acts but any Act for any purpose and, in this respect, it is related to a harbour.

I take exception to that provision, because it transgresses the principle that an Act of Parliament should be amended only by another Act of Parliament. If it is contentious, it should be debated as an Act and not smuggled through in a statutory instrument, still less one that has no powers of annulment and is not even subject to an affirmative resolution. Here, we have that in extenso.

Amendment No. 122 seeks to delete the power to dispose of property that is not required for the purpose of the harbour. As the Minister has powers to close virtually all the harbour—there is no limitation on his power in that respect—he also has the power to dispose of property around the harbour. Such places are often of considerable scenic beauty and local amenity, are much prized and of high value. I do not object to the fact that the provision includes the power to change the facilities in a harbour for vessels that are not just sea-going ships, which is the original definition. Subsection (2) says:

"there shall be added the words 'or in the interests of the recreational use of sea-going ships'"

Although those small harbours can be closed, they can also be changed to function as marinas. As you, Mr. Speaker, know, as you were in the House at the time, marinas can sometimes be controversial. I remember the legislation on the Brighton marina, which surged to and fro through the Chamber like a wave for two or three Sessions, and provoked highly controversial and emotional speeches.

I do not say that the powers will be given to 600 Brighton marinas, but they will be given to about that many small ports and harbours throughout the country. People believe that the rights and usages of such harbours —usually of high civic value—are entrenched in Acts. If enacted, the Bill will sweep those away and give the Secretary of State enormous powers that I do not believe he should have. Therefore, I hope that he will explain why he wants that power, which I do not believe the House should give him.

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) dealt partly with the next two groups of amendments, to which I shall come shortly. I do not believe that his argument is as weighty as he might imagine.

As I said in Committee, an order cannot provide for the complete closure of an harbour or enable the authority to get rid of its statutory function. The Minister must be convinced that he ought to give powers to dispose of the land in the interests of the harbour. The Bill changes nothing in principle, and I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the amendment, which would merely leave the 1964 Act in its present confusing state, which would not benefit anyone.

Mr. Spearing: I accept that my speech strayed on to amendment No. 123, but I do not accept the Minister's explanation. He said that he cannot complete the closure of a harbour, but I never said that he could. I said that the Bill virtually gave him the powers to do so if he so chose.

We all know that harbours are viable only if certain facilities are available and fully used. I cannot withdraw the amendment, but no doubt the Minister will try to negative it on the voice.

Amendment negatived.

Mr. Spearing: I beg to move amendment No. 123, in page 38, leave out lines 41 to 43.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 124, in page 39, line 8, leave out sub-paragraph (3).

Mr. Spearing: I have already partly covered this point, as it related to amendment No. 122. However, the amendment also covers an equally stringent provision contained in paragraph 2(3) of schedule 3 where, in relation to the original legislation—the ports and harbours orders—

"after the words 'any other enactment' there shall be inserted the words 'and provisions for excluding or modifying any provision of any Act or of any instrument made under any Act (including this Act)".

For the reasons I gave a few moments ago, I cannot believe that it is right. Therefore, I hope that the Minister will give us an explanation for the inclusion of paragraphs 1(4)(c) and 2(3) in schedule 3. I do not believe that he should have those powers.

Mr. Cryer: Why does the word "excluding" replace "repealing" and the word "modifying" replace "amending"? I suppose that the power will no longer enable the Minister to repeal a section of an Act, but he will be able to exclude a section of an Act from an order that he is making. It is not very clear. I think that paragraph 1(4)(c) of schedule 3 means that his powers will be slightly reduced. Will the Minister confirm that, and state why the section is being retained?

Mr. McLoughlin: Section 14(3) of the Harbours Act 1964 provides for inclusion of provisions repealing or amending provisions in local Acts. Paragraph 1(4)(b) widens the power to enable the order to disapply or modify the application of general statutes but not to repeal or amend them. Harbour revision orders, unlike private Bills, cannot be used to modify or disapply provisions in general Acts or subordinate legislation of general application except in special cases such as section 43(3) of the Docks and Harbours Act 1966.

Paragraph 2 makes similar provision for harbour empowerment orders under section 16 of the 1964 Act. Section 16 did not, however, provide for the repeal of the amending of local Acts that section 14 did. Because it is by nature a harbour empowerments order, it sets up a harbour authority for an area where there was previously no harbour authority and no local legislation relating to harbours.

The commonest example of this application of general statutory provisions in private Acts relating to harbours is the disapplication of General Development Orders. Similarly, for the purposes of harbour revision orders it may be preferable to deal with planning authorities about the development as a whole instead of relying on GDOs for part of the planning permission or orders.

The effects of paragraphs 1 and 2 will be to give greater flexibility, especially where part of the proposed development is subject to normal planning permission. I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman.

It being Ten o'clock, further consideration of the Bill stood adjourned.

To be further considered tomorrow.

NURSES, MIDWIVES AND HEALTH VISITORS BILL *[LORDS]*

As amended (in the Standing Committee) to be considered tomorrow.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As the Government Whip has not moved the 10 o'clock business motion, did he make any change to the information on the Annunciator? As you have seen, Mr. Speaker, there is a petition on the Order Paper and it seems unfair—*[Interruption.]* I hope that I shall be able to continue without the interruption of raucous shouts from pinstripe hooligans from the Whips Office. It might be worth trying to encourage Government Whips to ensure that business changes are made clear on the annunciator. That is what the annunciators are for, and it is daft to spend thousands of pounds installing information television sets throughout the Palace of Westminster and then not inform people when business is changed at a moment's notice.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter of order. I do not know when the decision was made. It was Conservative Members who had petitions down, and I suppose that they might well have been informed. It is not a matter for me.

Dyslexics (Diagnosis and Treatment)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

10.2 pm

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): I am pleased to have the Adjournment debate and the assistance of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess). The debate is on the subject of the diagnosis and treatment of dyslexia. I shall start by repeating the words of an eight-year-old child to his mother. The child said, "Do you know what I think? I think God has put my brain in upside down." That shows the problem facing many children suffering from dyslexia.

The signs and the symptoms of dyslexia are that those suffering from it have difficulty with literacy skills and sometimes some aspects of numeracy. They have a short-term memory weakness, auditory or visual. That means that they cannot take down dictation from the blackboard or orally because, by the time five words have been put on the blackboard, they have forgotten the first words. They have language and sequencing difficulties and left-right confusion and mixed dominance. They have motor problems, are clumsy and suffer from the reversal of letters and words. There is a short attention span and dyslexics lack concentration. They also suffer from disorganisation, erratic performance and hyperactivity.

In infant school, such children may be articulate and appear bright, but they may appear shy and have problems with speech and language. They find it hard to settle down to work; they may be clumsy and untidy because of the difficulty that they have in dressing. They may not have decided whether they are right or left-handed. Attempts to write, draw and cut may be very immature. They will experience difficulty in forming letters correctly: they may mirror-write, and not be aware that what they are producing is wrong. They may reverse stem letters, and invert "u" and "n", "m" and "w", more than other children in the class.

Such children have difficulty in associating sounds and symbols. If they are mastered, the children may have difficulty in using sound and symbol knowledge. They may have auditory discrimination problems: for example, "f", "v" and "th" sound the same to them. They may have visual memory and discrimination problems. They do not know how to learn, and cannot learn, by the "look and say" method of teaching children to read. They have trouble following instructions; if they understand them, they often forget them very quickly.

The children have a poor sense of time. They will be late; they will be disorganised. They have difficulty with sequencing—with days of the week and the alphabet, or with counting. If a child cannot read, his teacher may say, "Do not worry. He is a slow developer; he will read when he is ready." And so it goes on in that teacher's class, as the seven-year-old becomes an 11-year-old. Such children may well be frustrated; they may well switch off and daydream.

Typically, the signs are the same in the junior school child, but they become more pronounced. Children will have language problems. They may have difficulty in thinking of the name for something. Conversations will be peppered with "watchermacallit", "thingummyjig" and similar expressions, which give the children time to think what they really want to say. They will have trouble with multiplication tables, days of the week, months of the year and the alphabet. Again, they will be clumsy and disorganised. They will probably develop behavioural problems. Such a child will either be the class clown, or very withdrawn, shy and dispirited. Eventually, he will probably play truant and absent himself from school

Such behaviour is not put right even when the children attend secondary school. Reading and spelling ages will be well below the ability range; reading ability will be adequate, while spelling problems persist. Typically, such children will not read for pleasure. They may have very slow reading speeds. They may get the gist, but get it very inaccurately. Essay writing and written exam performance are well below the standard of oral contributions. Pupils have difficulty in taking notes, and in memorising materials for exams. They will be disorganised, and have difficulty in planning their time and keeping track of materials as a child of 12, 13 or 14 might be expected to do.

The children may have limited vocabularies, and little interest in words. They may interpret language very literally. They will have poor concentration. They will have daydreams, or become fidgety. They will find French, or any foreign language, extremely difficult. Handwriting and presentation may still be poor, and inaccurate copying may present problems.

The children may continue to experience left-right confusion and sequencing difficulty. They will tend to fall apart under pressure, particularly as regards spelling. The quality of their work will be very variable, depending on the conditions in which the work is produced and on how the child is feeling: he has good and bad days.

The teacher will say that the work that the child produces on a good day just shows how well he can do, and that, if only he would make more effort, he would get there. School reports, typically, will contain remarks such as "Must try harder", "He is lazy", "He is careless", "Oral work good, written work poor", "Must work harder at spelling", "Must read more" and "Exam results disappointing".

All those tendencies are typical of dyslexic children throughout their years of schooling, and they can all be corrected. Such children can develop into very worthwhile people, whether they are very intelligent or very unintelligent. They can be helped in their schools.

What are the remedies? Fundamentally, a dyslexic needs very intensive teaching. Dyslexics are infuriating people to teach. The teacher will have to give them extra attention and will have to recognise their difficulties. They will have to be given support, confidence and motivation. Things that they can remember today they will have forgotten entirely within a week. This means intensive teaching.

They cannot learn to spell or read without the use of phonetics or the phonic word method of teaching. Of course, that is not to exclude other methods of teaching to which they will respond, but, fundamentally, it is not possible to achieve reading and spelling recovery unless phonetics and phonics are used. Their short-term memory and their resulting difficulties with dictation or writing down from the blackboard must be understood by the teacher. Unless a child has taken down his prep from the blackboard or, alternatively, has written down what has been dictated, the rest of the lesson will be lost. The teacher must make certain that the dyslexic child has got the material down and is therefore able to do the work. It is therefore necessary that the teacher spends extra time—not much, but some—with the dyslexic child.

Of course, dyslexic children must not be humiliated. Many of them are very conscious of the fact that their friends, who seem to be just about as bright, just the same, as they, can read aloud but that they cannot. They get confused, and then they are criticised and humiliated, with the ridicule that that attracts. That leads to a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem. They then turn off completely, and their confidence evaporates. And this happens at the ages of six and seven. They need help and encouragement and patience—indeed, intensive teaching.

Why should we be concerned about this? These are problems with which any schoolteacher is familiar and has seen day in and day out. It is true that 10 per cent. of the school population have dyslexia, whether mildly or very seriously, and that 4 per cent. probably need statementing. However, the rest can be taught in the classroom. They can be encouraged and helped to realise their capabilities within the classroom.

What happens when provision is not made? For example, it has been proven that, of those below the age of 18 convicted of criminal offences, 80 per cent. are dyslexic. This is typical of the results of not teaching and helping dyslexics at an earlier age. These people use their abilities in an alternative way—many of them criminally—to attract attention, fulfil their ambitions and boost their self-esteem. So it is important socially, as well as from a humanitarian point of view, that we try to enable children to realise their capabilities.

We can correct the situation. By doing so we would save massively in the re-education of these children and in subsequent social and even political costs. The problem could be addressed quite simply and quite economically in a five-point programme, about which I hope my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to respond positively.

First, phonics, or the teaching of reading through the use of phonetics, should be compulsorily included in initial teacher training courses and, indeed, in the one-year postgraduate course. We need to make certain that teachers are capable of diagnosing and teaching dyslexics. Provision must be made in the initial teacher training syllabus and in the syllabus for the post-graduate diploma.

Those teachers who are already in post must be enabled to take a recognised qualification in the teaching of dyslexics, such as that promoted by the Royal Society of Arts, which will attract additional salary as recognition of the additional skill. Thus our existing teaching force will be enabled to diagnose and treat dyslexia.

In addition, the extra provision in the budget of each school, to which I referred earlier, is needed so that the teachers may spend that necessary little bit of extra time coping with the infuriating dyslexic—the pupil who needs a little extra time. That must be provided for in the school budget. Dyslexia requires a ring-fenced part of the education budget of approximately £2·1 million, which must be separate from the special learning difficulties provision in the education budget. It must be separate from and additional to that budget. Dyslexia must not be confused with the generality of special learning difficulties, although 4 per cent. of dyslexics will need special treatment over and above what I am talking about, under separate statementing procedures.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State has been extremely kind and generous in receiving delegations led by me on two occasions in the last six months from the British Dyslexia Association, with which my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon is associated. At our initial meeting with my hon. Friend, he said that he had a number of investigations to undertake and that he intended to invite those undertaking investigations into teacher training to look into the matter and to make proposals to him along the lines set out at the meeting. He kindly asked the delegation to return six months later.

We went back to see my hon. Friend six months later, in January of this year. Again he gave us enormous encouragement by lending his support to the programmes that we put to him and by his understanding of the problems involved. I very much hope that tonight the Minister will be able to give further encouragement to those members of the teaching profession who have to deal with this difficult problem by saying that he will try to implement the five-point programme that I have put before the House.

10.16 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) on his excellent speech and on raising this important subject.

Dyslexia is of great interest and concern to my constituents in Basildon and is of particular interest to me. At the age of five, in a class of 50, my mother was summoned to see the class mistress in the excellent school that I attended, St. Anthony's infants school, Forest Gate. She was told that I had very severe learning difficulties. I had a pronounced stutter. I could not make the sounds "st" and "th".

For three years after that, I had elocution lessons—special tuition—and was then denied my rightful heritage of a cockney accent. I am very grateful, however, that my learning difficulties were identified. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and to the Basildon dyslexia association, led by one of my constituents, Mrs. Christine Haggerty, and her excellent committee.

For some little while, Essex county council was reluctant, as the Minister knows, to recognise that there was such as thing as dyslexia. That is understandable. In this day and age, when parents might have anxieties about their children's educational progress, it is easy to seize on the subject of dyslexia and say, "But so many children have dyslexia." We all know that children can be somewhat cruel to each other. I know that my hon. Friend is wary of identifying children in so highlighted a way that they might suffer teasing from other children. However, this is a very important subject.

Excellent workshops are held at the weekend in Basildon. I have been to see the wonderful work that is being done there. All sorts of techniques are used. The children are making great progress with reading, spelling and their general development. I hope that we shall have an excellent centre in Basildon. I endorse my hon. Friend's remarks. We both look forward to listening to the Minister's response to our concerns.

10.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Michael Fallon): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) on raising dyslexia as an issue for debate this evening. This is not the first time that we have debated the subject. My hon. Friend attended the debate that was initiated by my right hon. Friend the Member for

[Mr. Michael Fallon]

Worcester (Mr. Walker) some time ago. My hon. Friend has pursued his interest in this subject with great vigour. I recall meeting him and his associates at the Department, when we had more than one positive and helpful discussion of the subject.

Dyslexia is a very wide and important topic. It is capable of supporting continued debate without retreading old ground. This evening, the subject of debate is more particularly the diagnosis and treatment of dyslexia, upon which I intend to concentrate.

Everything that my hon. Friend said spoke volumes about the need to catch the problems much earlier than we have. Study after study has shown how important it is to identify dyslexia as soon as possible in a child's development. If we do that, those in the medical, caring and teaching professions can then start to take the appropriate steps leading to early remediation of the difficulty, where that is possible.

It is often not appreciated that there are early signs, even in very young children, which suggest that a child might subsequently develop specific learning difficulties. The signs and the children may be difficult to identify with certainty, even by the trained eye. That is because the signals being given are often mixed or very close in nature to the signs which might, equally, indicate different sorts of difficulties or developmental delays.

The main point is that, if a child is giving some cause for concern, the behaviour and performance should be examined more closely and the child should be monitored very carefully over the succeeding period to try to discover the exact causes. As my hon. Friend knows, dyslexia is not just about getting words jumbled up. It is much more complicated.

Even before a child starts school, a doctor or health visitor might see a child with a very bumpy developmental profile. That should sound an initial warning. The doctor may know if other family members have any history of serious problems with literacy. The child may show signs of clumsiness, or poor co-ordination in gross or fine motor movements, distractibility or poor concentration. There may be a delay in the development of speech and language, or by and large normal development coupled with a difficulty in, say, drawing shapes. Anything requiring sequential ability—for example giving the days of the week in order or repeating patterns or instructions—may give the vital first indication of specific learning difficulties.

Sometimes, specific difficulties unrelated to sensory impairment may become apparent at nursery school. In such cases, the teacher who spots them may be able to seek advice from the educational psychologist or the pre-school specialist teachers. If those difficulties are marked or show signs of developing, careful monitoring of the child will be needed. That means that we must involve the parents at an early stage. They know more about the child than anyone.

By the time the child has got to school, and in the first few years there, the signs of dyslexia or other specific learning difficulties become more easily distinguishable from those exhibited by children with other difficulties or developmental delays. The child with dyslexia is often set apart by the skills shown and by demonstrable intelligence in other areas. The child in his early school days might present as an imaginative and bright child who, for example, rather surprisingly cannot write his or her name, repeat digits or even copy letters or shapes.

The key indicator might again be that the developmental profile is uneven, and those warning bells sound again if there is a family history of literacy difficulties. Again, if there are worries, early referral to the educational psychologist is one way forward. It is only when an accurate profile has been constructed that an appropriate teaching programme can be arranged.

My hon. Friend suggested that the skills required to enable teachers to make a preliminary diagnosis of dyslexia and then to use the appropriate teaching techniques should be included in all initial teaching training courses. Those who provide such courses are already required to equip prospective teachers to teach the full range of pupils whom they are likely to encounter in an ordinary school, and to introduce them to ways of identifying children with special educational needs that includes cases of dyslexia.

Further training is also available for teachers of pupils with dyslexia. Training of teachers to deal with special educational needs in ordinary schools is one of the priorities supported by the Department through the grants for education support and training scheme. The Department has also sponsored the production of an audio-visual pack aimed to assist teachers in ordinary schools to identify children with special needs, one module of which is specifically concerned with dyslexia.

I am delighted to be able to say that the Department has also recently provided £34,000 for research into how dyslexia can be identified as early as possible, so that those needing the sort of specialised teaching methods that I have outlined can take advantage of them without delay. That work is being undertaken by the Hereford and Worcester branch of the British Dyslexia Association in conjunction with Birmingham university, and I look forward to seeing the results.

I deal now with treatment. There is a range of professionals within the child health service who may be able to offer help within an integrated programme of support for the child with special educational needs. Sometimes, emotional and behavioural difficulties are associated with dyslexia. If so, the educational or clinical psychologist has a role. If the child has marked speech or language difficulties, the speech therapist will usually come into it. The paediatric physiotherapist can help if there are gross motor co-ordination difficulties, and the occupational therapist can help if there are fine motor co-ordination difficulties. If the child is easily distractable or over-active on some days and not on others, there may be some other sensitivity or food allergy—in such cases the dietician comes into his or her own. Sometimes, all those professionals need to get together to produce an integrated programme for the individual child, and I urge that they do so when that is going to be of substantial benefit to the child.

Where pupils are identified as having dyslexia, it is up to the professionals concerned to adopt, where necessary, a particular teaching programme to assist the pupil with the areas of difficulty—usually concentrating on r eading and spelling. Examples of such specialised programmes are the Hickey programme, Alpha to Omega, or the Arrow programme. Most such programmes include teaching with a multi-sensory approach in order to give the pupil

maximum support through a variety of auditory, visual, and tactile stimuli—each reinforcing the others and lessening the pupil's dependence on any one.

Children are unique, and it is therefore not surprising that their needs are nearly all different in some ways. The key is for the professionals and teachers to discover which of the different approaches will be suitable for the pupil in question.

My hon. Friend suggested that the national curriculum should permit the use of phonics in teaching children to read. I agree. The national curriculum does that. Those parts of the orders for English concerned with reading combine a range of the most widely used and successful techniques for helping pupils to acquire and develop their reading skills. Those include the use of picture and context cues, words recognised on sight and phonic cues.

My hon. Friend also argued that instruction in phonics should be made compulsory in ITT courses. Phonics is already a feature of such courses, at least according to the staff involved, but it is usually presented—I think that this is the core of my hon. Friend's concern—as merely one of the various possible strategies of attack. The Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education inquiry into the teaching of reading produced some useful evidence on that, and I must ask my hon. Friends to be patient and await the publication of its report, which is imminent. I shall say a little more about that in a moment.

As for the support grants and teacher training, the Government recognise that in-service teacher training has a crucial role to play in implementing all aspects of the curriculum. The GEST programme is the principle vehicle. In the current year that programme is supporting LEA expenditure of £170 million in relation to the implementation of the basic curriculum and related assessment arrangements, of which £78 million is for in-service training. In 1992-93, that will rise to £88 million. Of that, about £12·9 million has been set aside by the Government to support local education authorities in the training of teachers and others involved in special educational needs, including those in further education.

My hon. Friend suggested specifically that part of that money should be ring-fenced for courses on specific literacy difficulties and that resources devoted to dyslexia should be kept separate from other SEN resources. We have been conducting a thorough review of the GEST arrangements as they apply to training related to special educational needs. We have considered the number of categories of special educational need training which are eligible for grant under the GEST programme. We have not made the final decisions, but the review is nearing completion and we hope soon to be able to incorporate any changes in the GEST programme for 1993-94. I cannot say much more than that other than that I am pursuing my hon. Friend's specific suggestion.

My hon. Friend also suggested that holders of the Royal Society of Arts diploma in specific learning difficulties should be entitled to receive additional salary allowances, as do at present, for example, holders of qualifications in the deaf, blind and deaf-blind field. I should make it clear that those latter qualifications are mandatory for teachers working in the areas concerned, while the RSA diploma is not, but in any case, the school teachers' review body, in its first report, said that it intended to seek specific evidence on the pay and conditions of teachers in special schools and classes generally as part of its next review. Therefore, we must await its findings on that.

When I addressed the House on the subject of dyslexia last April, I said that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State had asked the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education to undertake an inquiry into the preparation of student primary teachers to teach reading. The council was asked as part of that inquiry to consider dyslexia specifically, and its report will be published shortly. I am taking a keen interest in how it will be received as a contribution to improving reading standards. My hon. Friends will find that report contains much of interest, and much that strengthens their case for further reform.

It will be evident from my remarks that improving reading standards is a priority for this Government. We recently announced also a national trial of the reading recovery programme pioneered in New Zealand by Dame Marie Clay. That involves the provision of daily individual teaching in reading and writing for the lowest achieving six-year-olds in ordinary classrooms. Within an average of 12 to 15 weeks, most of those children will have reached the average level of attainment in reading, and we hope that those gains will be sustained.

By providing that tuition for the lowest-achieving pupils at age six, we believe that the number of children in our schools with reading difficulties can be effectively reduced. Funding is concentrated on teacher training in the early stages.

As you, Mr. Speaker, have graced us with your presence tonight, and have a considerable personal interest in the subject, it is appropriate that I should conclude my remarks with a reference to a major development very close to the constituency that you have served so well and so long, for so many years.

When I spoke on dyslexia last April, I mentioned the important research being conducted at the Harris city technology college in Croydon. It is receiving £250,000 of central support over three academic years, and it is already producing interesting results. The intention is to meet the need for further practical investigation into how dyslexia can be tackled.

Our overall aim, building on that research, is to ensure that all pupils have the fullest access to the national curriculum. That research is in midstream, and it will not be finished until the autumn of 1993. There are, however, encouraging signs that research may have helped already towards identifying new ways of grading and diagnosing dyslexic tendencies in children—but more must be done.

I am grateful to my hon. Friends for raising and pursuing this important matter. I welcomed an opportunity to say a few words about the positive steps that the Government have taken, which I hope have been helpful. My personal view is that the Department, local education authorities, and the wider educational world are moving the issue of dyslexia forward. I want the House left in no doubt as to my personal commitment to seeing progress made.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 21 February 1992

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

Skye (Toll Bridge)

9.34 am

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I beg leave to present a petition signed by more than 3,000 of my constituents of Skye and Lochalsh district expressing their opposition to the proposed private toll-funded bridge to Skye by means of high private tolls.

To the honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House will recognise that the imposition of high tolls would be a discriminatory act against an already disadvantaged community, leaving no practical alternative means of crossing available, as is the case with users of toll-road bridges elsewhere in Scotland.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Balligan House, Bangor

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): I beg leave to present a petition signed by more than 2,000 of my constituents who strenuously oppose, as I do, the closure of Balligan house for the mentally handicapped, situated in Bangor in my constituency.

The Eastern health board intends to eject the mentally handicapped residents who have come to look on Balligan house as their home and have formed an attachment to an extremely dedicated staff. The board will disperse them in all directions, regardless of their wishes and needs.

The petitioners pray

That your honourable House will appeal to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to intervene to stop the threatened closure. Balligan house for the mentally handicapped accommodates 14 residents in a happy, stable and homely atmosphere. The closure of Balligan house for the mentally handicapped would be an extreme act of callousness and unfair to the mentally handicapped residents and staff, who together form a big happy family.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

BILL PRESENTED

FRIENDLY SOCIETIES

Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported by Mr. Secretary Baker, Mr. Secretary Brooke, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lilley, Mr. Secretary Lang and Mr. John Maples, presented a Bill to make further provision for friendly societies; to provide for the cessation of registration under the Friendly Societies Act 1974; to make provision about disputes involving friendly societies or other bodies registered under the Friendly Societies Act 1974 and about the functions of the Chief Registrar of friendly societies; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday 24 February and to be printed. [Bill 86.]

Orders of the Day

Referendum Bill

Order for Second Reading read.—[Queen's Consent signified.]

9.37 am

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill requires a national referendum as a pre-condition of the ratification of certain treaties. The essential thrust of the Bill is contained in the 65 words of the first clause, which provides that a referendum should be called in the event that the powers of this House to regulate the affairs of this country are diminished.

To calm the disquiet of some, may I make an observation about what the referendum does not do. It does not call into question legislation that has already passed the House. Therefore, the original Communities legislation is not at risk, nor is the amendment to that original legislation which we commonly know as the Single European Act. The referendum would refer and relate specifically and only to those events that take place after the passing of this Bill.

The Maastricht treaties, which are central to the concentration of our ideas on what we are discussing, signify a further significant transfer of powers from this country and the ability of Members of this House to regulate the affairs of our people. It is an extraordinary treaty in as much as it contends for a new political organisation—the union of Europe—in which, on 1 January 1993, we become citizens of a new political organisation. That also applies to Her Majesty the Queen. It would effect that which the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), in his Bill, and the Levellers themselves no less have not succeeded in effecting—it would reduce the Queen to a citizen. That is contrary to our constitutional traditions. I cite that not because of its great importance, but because it shows the extent to which the treaty is a new political organisation. My contention is that no such profound constitutional change should take place without reference to the people.

Involved in that concept is the idea of where sovereignty in this country lies. I have always maintained, as do many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, that sovereignty resides with the people; we are the expression of that sovereignty. When we rise and defend the House of Commons, we defend not ourselves, our privileges or our prides, but the pride, individuality and privileges of our fellow citizens. Each one of us here assembled is here only because we have been sent forth to represent our fellow electors. We are no different from them, other than that they have reposed in us confidence that we will address ourselves to the political business of our nation.

I belong to a union—the Union of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is a political allegiance which I gladly give. It is one of sentiment, one of passion, one which has been fashioned over the course of centuries. That is to be set aside because the Treaty of Union seeks to make me a citizen of elsewhere. I would be a citizen with a profound and essential difference: I could not control the laws, in whole areas, by which I would be governed.

I make that point because it is essential to our nation's understanding of what our rule of law is. We maintain that every citizen of this Union should obey the law—a law that, in the end, we have formed, fashioned, made and defended. If we wish to change it, we know the processes by which to do so, and we hold Governments accountable to that effect. When we repose confidence in members of the Government Front Bench, the laws that they suggest we make are within our call. If they get it wrong, we may change them. Where in that Treaty of Union is the mechanism by which we may change the law? If we cannot change the law, how do we expect to insist on obedience from all of us? As I have said, we are no different from anyone else; the law applies to us just as it does to our fellow electors. When each one of us was elected in 1987, we were given the trust to maintain, control, alter and fashion law. Under the Treaty of Union, we have no such powers.

Of course, it will be argued from the Front Benches that the process has been a while in the making and that it has been sanctioned by the Single European Act—which is true. I am sure that in a more scrupulous age we would have argued that, on such a profound constitutional change, the electorate should be consulted. I shall cite two instances of that, because we used to believe in this House in what was called the specific mandate. I refer to the specific mandate because it was the reason why we did not need to resort to a referendum.

One of the two great constitutional fights of the past century was the great Reform Bill of 1832. There was no doubt in the mind of the Parliament that voted for that that the matter would be resolved at an election. There was a clear distinction between the views of Mr. Peel and those who promoted the Bill. The electorate was able to choose. Similarly, in 1910, although the argument for a referendum was mooted, there was no doubt that the divide between the parties was sufficient to give the electorate an opportunity to judge those issues that were most in their interest.

Those are clear and important examples of what I call the specific mandate. Indeed, the argument for a specific mandate echoes through the history of the 20th century. Mr. Baldwin, elected in 1931 with a confident and strong majority, said that his Government had to go to the country in 1932 on the question whether there should be tariffs—an incidence that he shared with Balfour 20 years before. He lost that election and, in the way of such matters, the exercise has never been repeated. We now reside in this House on the concept of more general than specific mandates.

The question would not go away, because in the ultimate sanction of entry into the Community, as it was originally proposed, many in the House recognised that it was so fundamental to the way in which we had historically done our business that we would be taking away the power by which we regulated some of our decisions if we accepted the body of law already established by the Community.

Let us put aside that consideration and think about some of the essential claims made at that time. Harold Wilson, in his White Paper, was at pains to emphasise that, ultimately, there could be no change within the laws of the Community except with the sanction of a British Minister responsible to his House and thus accountable to every one of our electors. That was an essential selling point of the new relationship with the European Community.

Notwithstanding that, for the internal reasons that the Labour party thought necessary, but with the support of a great many others, a referendum was held. It actually settled the issue for almost 10 years, until the Single European Act. That was one of the great benefits. Some in my party object to referendums. They say that they are an affront to parliamentary sovereignty. I tried to deal with that question by showing that, in fact, parliamentary sovereignty is the concentrated expression of the sovereignty of the electorate. Therefore, how can it be an affront to the sovereignty of the electorate if it is asked specifically to judge an issue of great constitutional importance?

The other point often made is that it would be intolerable for a Ministry to have a referendum in which the electorate flew against the Ministry's advice. Would not the Ministry be forced to introduce policies with which it did not agree? Is not that an intolerable burden to place upon Government? Much has been made of that argument. Mr. Churchill threw it across the Floor at Mr. Balfour; and Mr. Powell enunciated it in early 1969, although he later changed his mind.

The answer to that argument is that we have all been in this House when Governments have been forced to change their mind, even on a principal policy on which they were elected—or claimed to be. I need only cite the embarrassment of myself and others on the question of the poll tax. The Ministers who said that the poll tax was absolutely essential and that it was the flagship are still in their Ministries. It is tolerable to continue in government only if Ministers recognise the virtues and the duties imposed upon them as Ministers of the Crown. It is not an answer to say that it is an intolerable burden; the proof of our history has demonstrated just how tolerable it has been to sufficient numbers of Members of Parliament.

A leading article in *The Independent* today suggested that a referendum might be appropriate on a single currency. We can pursue that debate, and I do not doubt that hon. Members will do so today. I want to make it clear that my simple objection is to the political union. I have tried to sketch out the way in which the people of this country will be bound by laws and rules that are made elsewhere by unelected officials and a Council of Ministers that is accountable to no one—no Europewide electorate, and not even us ultimately. Even if our Minister today went to argue his corner within that unelected, undemocratic forum, and even though he may say that 100 per cent. of the citizens of the United Kingdom are opposed to whatever it is, if it is the view of others by qualified majority vote—on a whole range of issues set out in the Treaty of Union—it will become the law of this country. What can we do about it? That is the great break with our tradition that requires that Maastricht should be scrutinised.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is there not something even more sinister in people talking in abstract terms about Britain becoming part of this political union? People may have the impression that we, the 12 countries and perhaps more, are all pals together. The truth is that the real powerhouse of the Common Market lies in Germany. It has just annexed East Germany. It is central to the activities of all the nation states that are falling apart in eastern Europe. Political union spells something much more sinister, and that is German domination. We fought for six years against it in the second world war. If hon. Members allow this political union, they will allow the Germans to win now when they lost in 1945.

Mr. Shepherd: It is true that the dominant economic power in Europe is Germany. With the advent of the Community and the unity and greater cohesion of Germany, Germany seems to be the dominant central European power. My fear and an argument made over the years is that the periphery will gravitate towards the centre. Therefore, Britain, as a peripheral part of the Community, will be marginal within the great tides of central European perceptions.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): It is always pleasing to me to take up an intervention by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). He will recall that in 1979 I almost beat him in the election.

Mr. Skinner: He did not.

Mr. Favell: I was about 20,000 short, Madam Deputy Speaker. I agree with what the hon. Gentleman said. Whether or not Germany seeks to dominate Europe, it will, like it or not. Geographically it is at the centre and economically it is the most powerful. The German character is such—I happen to be half German, so I can speak from experience——

Mr. James Cran (Beverley): Oh dear.

Mr. Favell: The truth will out—they cannot go on a picnic without running it. That is within the German character. One must prepare oneself for it. If we do not say no now, Germany will inevitably dominate the political union. Nineteen ninety-six is too late. We are locked into the exchange rate mechanism and all that goes with it to ensure that we have a fixed exchange rate. That will inevitably lead to a single currency, whether we like it or not. By then a referendum will be far too late.

Mr. Shepherd: I am glad of my hon. Friend's intervention. The purpose of the debate is not to identify Germany or any other country as a threat; it is to concentrate our minds on what is right for us as a people in terms of our Government and institutions.

Most hon. Members agree that we want the closest possible harmony, friendship and co-operation with those countries to which we are adjacent. There can be no doubt about that. The process by which we have conducted our foreign affairs during the past 20 years or so shows a great will to work in harmony to lay to rest the fears of 40 or 50 years ago when we had to mobilise the nation to fight a war for national survival. We could mobilise our people and win that war. It was a people's war because the House of Commons had no doubt that we had to defend our liberties. At the end of the day, our freedoms and liberties are secure so long as we, the people, secure them through our institutions.

I want to give an instance of what happens when we opt for qualified majority voting and what it does to our institutions. We all know that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has effectively become a branch office of Brussels. When the Minister stands before us and claims some sort of casual relationship, and therefore parliamentary responsibility for his deeds, we all know in our hearts and many of us in our voices that it is transparent. It is a charade.

[Mr. Shepherd]

There is a consensus in this country that the common agricultural policy is wrong. It costs the consumer great sums. It does not satisfy the farmer. It causes problems for the general agreement on tariffs and trade. It interferes with our overseas foreign policy. We have many friends abroad who form part of our commonwealth of nations. What has happened to their agriculture? Is it aid to those less fortunate than ourselves that we will not buy their sugar because it is at a free price and on an open market? We do not hold it to be so. Yet the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, with a clear majority across the House, would tomorrow be forced to scrap that policy and introduce a policy that better meets the needs of our consumers, our farmers, our world trading position and our foreign policy. We cannot do that because we, the House of Commons and the people of England, are bound to accept the nostrums and perceptions of other people.

I have nothing to say against the nostrums and perceptions of other people, because what is appropriate to France and Italy is for the French and Italians to judge. They must defend their institutions or submerge them in what they want. I will not let go by the nonsense that the former Foreign Secretary paraded through the House to its shame and, I believe, to his—the idea that sovereignty can be pooled. It has been observed that sovereignty means constitutional independence only and, like virginity, once lost it is gone. The former Foreign Secretary is of a belief that sovereignty can be pooled. If it is pooled, how do we control the laws under which we live? I asked him that, but I have had no answer to the question.

I return to the debate that took place after the Maastricht conference. I want to make an observation about a major constitutional change, such as those that in the past have required Governments to go to the country on the specific instance. Was there a ministerial broadcast to tell us the nature of the changes? No, there was a party political broadcast that required no reply and that lasted for five or 10 minutes. Did the Labour party have an opportunity to give its clear adherence to all the contentions now contained in the document for political union? No, it did not. Was there an opportunity for the Liberal party to tell us its wilder dreams for submerging its own regard for British citizens? Was there any opportunity, therefore, to tell the people of the consequences, the meaning, how the power was transferred and where it was? Not one.

During the debate I listened extremely carefully to the Leader of the Opposition. Indeed, there were eight spokesmen on both Front Benches, but not one touched on the constitutional issue. Why? It is the very issue that brings us here, the very basis on which I am elected and the very equality of citizenship. Not one word. It was important to the history of us all.

I am a Conservative Member of Parliament because of the actions of many working-class people within the Labour movement who worked to extend the franchise. I am not even sure that my grandfather could vote in the 1910 election. We forget too easily that many of our people just did not have the vote. When Mr. Asquith grew worried about the idea of referendums, his argument was that if there was a referendum on the vote for women, it might lead to dreadful consequences; a referendum might extend the vote to people like my grandfather. It was too awful to contemplate. That is the cosiness that has brought the House into some level of disrepute.

It is important that we march by what our people want. We determined the matter across the Benches of the House, as I heard from the Leader of the Opposition. He knows what the power of the vote is. Yet, despite the struggles of the early Labour movement that brought the vote to me and my family, what did he have to say about the power of the vote? Not one word. The Labour movement grew out of proselytising—telling people that by obtaining the vote they could change the politics of this nation, that they could exercise control over the institutions, that they could divert the resources of this country towards ameliorating the conditions of the people of this country. What is our answer to that question? Certainly there was none from the leader of the Labour party.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The hon. Gentleman knows that I have the great privilege of representing the constituency of the first leader of the Labour party, James Keir Hardie, who came here to change the law in favour of ordinary people. Does he not agree, however, that there is now an obligation on Her Majesty's Government, who signed this bundle of documents that I hold in my hand, the plenipotentiary of the Foreign Secretary, to issue before the election a clear guide to the extraordinary combination of 350 new or rewritten articles and to tell us what it all means so that any party or any citizen can take a view, if that is necessary, before the new Parliament is elected?

Mr. Shepherd: It is a duty incumbent on any Government to set out clearly great changes as they affect an electorate. I agree that there should be a White Paper either before the election or after the election. It is clear from the statements by the Leader of the Opposition, with his disregard now for the vote and how he can change policies within this country, that there is to be no issue in the election about whether Maastricht was right or wrong. There is an essential argument for why a referendum should take place: that there should be a clear exposition that this, and this, and this will now be determined elsewhere, well beyond our call, and that notwithstanding this diminution of the power of the people and of this House, the Government and the Opposition of the day, if necessary, should recommend it to the people because there is a greater advantage, as yet unspecified, in losing self-government.

Both Front Benches hold forth—what I am saying rises above all parties—that there is a great gain in continuing and extending a new constitution. That is most extraordinary. As I said about the Maastricht debate, of eight Front-Bench spokesmen not one mentioned our constitutional arrangements, yet we are here only because of our constitution. The Leader of the Opposition does not even deign to say a word about why it is necessary to reduce the power of our people to control their affairs and the laws under which they live.

I believe most solemnly, and the House should, in my view, believe most solemnly, that there ought to be a direct exposition to the people of this country of what these changes amount to and why they are necessary. The people should be invited to give their advice upon it. That is the substance of the Bill. I have tried to be brief in outlining,

perhaps with some passion, why I think that the Bill is important and why it should be passed. None of us had this treaty before us during the Maastricht debate. What we had was a variety of drafts. The Luxembourg drafts secretly flew in the window of the Library.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): At 1.30 on the day of the debate.

Mr. Shepherd: My hon. Friend says at 1.30 on the day of the debate. Those drafts were available to our national newspapers. I made a point of ensuring that both *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, because they declare that they do not have a party allegiance, whatever that means, should have copies of the original Luxembourg draft.

Months went by, but did I have any analysis of the basis of the treaty? If I did not have it, how can the electorate out there have it? That is the freedom of the press, the freedom of Mr. Andreas Whittam Smith to suppress information, the freedom of Mr. Preston to suppress information because they take a view of the world, since they know that the views of the public are not worth having. What they have decided is a greater vision—a vision that they do not wish to share with us—that should be promoted through the editorial columns of their newspapers and that they should exercise——

Mr. Skinner: The chattering classes.

Mr. Shepherd: No, I do not accept that it is just the chattering classes. I just say that the dominance of the press means that its editors try to drive public opinion towards conclusions that they take for granted. That is unsatisfactory.

Why is it that *The Independent*, in possession of the draft treaty, could not advise the electorate that great issues were at stake? No, the game was much better to say that the British Government objected to something. All that can be presented then is a series of clashes. That of itself is informative. When I consider their solemn pledges about the freedom of the press, which I wholeheatedly support and which I have tried to introduce legislation to support, I find that when it comes to identifying great issues it is not for the hoi-polloi of the House of Commons or the people of this country to be troubled with the great stirrings that underlie these constitutional changes. *[Laughter.]* It is extraordinary that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) should laugh as though there were something curious about what I say. If he could point out where an analysis of these drafts was published at any time until within a week before the treaty was signed, I should be grateful for his comfort and advice. Of course he cannot do so. The curious point about this is that they believe that they take a broader view of life and know better than those out there. That is fair and fine if one argues one's corner—but who argues the European corner? The Government no longer do so. They merely announce that they have had a triumph—game, set, match is the flavour of the month. But game, set, match about what? What did we win? How did we win?

The forming of a constitution is not a question of winning or losing. It is a deliberate act, the careful weighing of the balances and the checks. There are people in this country who profoundly argue, through Charter 88, that our present checks and balances are inadequate. They argue for change. But do we argue for change? There is a constitution on the table. It is not the Charter 88's constitution. It is called the Treaty of Union. Every newspaper should ask what that means. It is a simple question. Can we change our laws under it? Again that is a simple question.

Neither *The Independent* nor *The Guardian* can address that issue; nor do they wish to do so. I have singled out those two newspapers, but the same charge can be laid against others. I chose them because they maintain that theirs is a balanced and independent view and that they come to conclusions. Therefore, I believe that they have a greater duty to inform the public of the great issues of the day. Highlighting them would enable us to have a debate. Why, therefore, in this electoral process are we unable specifically to discuss or refer this issue to the electorate? We are unable to do so because of the binding down and the consensus of opinion between the leaderships of parties. There is therefore no opportunity for the ordinary citizen to make a judgment.

Mr. Cash: In the midst of one of the most superb speeches that I have heard on this matter for a very long time, may I ask my hon. Friend whether he agrees that the statement that was made at last year's party conference by the chairman of the Conservative party—that we, the Conservatives, trust the people—should be shown to be the reality not only in the context of a referendum but by a free vote in the House when the Bill comes before us? Does my hon. Friend agree with both those propositions?

Mr. Shepherd: On account of the most profound constitutional changes that have been mooted, I believe that there should be a free vote. It is very difficult within the terms of Burke. I hear many of my colleagues say, "But we were elected and all that we owe to our constituents is our judgment. We cannot be bought by our constituents because we stand aside and weigh the evidence." All that would be true but for the three-line Whip and the guillotine. We do not owe our duties and allegiances in too many instances to our electorate; we owe them to the Whip. If we owe them to the Whip, how can we stand in front of the electorate and say, "But your views are honourably judged"?

I refer again to the Maastricht debate. There was a three-line Whip. I go back to the Single European Act. There was not only a three-line Whip but a guillotine. The House knows my views on the guillotine. I see that the Leader of the House is moving towards the view that guillotines are a natural, inevitable and desirable consequence of the way that we do our business. The letters that I have received shout with frustration about our political process and the fact that no longer do we seem to represent the people out there and properly express their views. How can we if we truncate great debates into three hours on a guillotine? How can we turn to our constituents and say, "I have looked at it and considered it. I have heard the arguments"? Not a bit. We have had the innovation of Baker Bills, with guillotines on all stages. It is a disgrace, and the public know that it is such.

However, passionate one may be about these matters, it is the duty of the House to be cautious of the consequences of legislation because it can send us to prison—the most solemn thing that it can do within our processes.

Legislation demands the old processes and procedures of the House: the First Reading to give notice, then a

[Mr. Shepherd]

pause; a Second Reading to consider the principle of the Bill, as we are doing today, and a further pause; the Committee stage, where we consider the contentions and legal arrangements of the Bill; and then it comes back to the House and is further considered. In those processes, the public may get in touch with us and argue their corner. That is terribly important for giving validity to the rule of law, because then no one can say that a Bill was smuggled through in an afternoon.

I am fortunate in having one of the great begetters of the guillotine movement in my party—my right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones)—who required 65 guillotines during his tenure of office. I have always thought that misjudged, because in the doing of small things, as we think at the time, we corrupt the greater principle—attestation, as Burke would say, that our electorates give either consent or acquiescence. If we truncate our debates and do not weigh their views, we are contemptuous of our electorates and they, in turn, are contemptuous of us.

I have never known the standing of Members of Parliament to be so low. I see people shudder almost as we pass and say, "You are only in it for what you can get". *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) makes a shudder in other ways—with administration, trepidation and inspiration. Nevertheless, the point is that we have broken that trust, no one else.

The insistence of the business managers is that we must be able to legislate endlessly—no self-denying ordinance there. The Baker Bill is the final nail in the coffin of a series of tendentious and difficult Bills where great principles were rushed through in a day.

We are elected every four or five years; our authority is clearly fresh. People feel that they have an idea of where we stand. During the course of a Parliament, our connection and the issues change. What people thought that they may have been voting on in 1987 is not necessarily what they think they are voting on today. The coming general election will be about a variety of issues—the economy, the national health service or whatever—but not about Europe. If Europe is mentioned in a party's programme, it will be as an aside—some general expression by which the public can diagnose no true intent. It is believed that, in that way, we can cover over the issue if there is an argument. That is why I make the point that there should be a specific reference to the electorate.

I say as a last note to the House that our people should "not go gentle into that good night" but should rather "rage, rage, against the dying of the light" that requires us to live under laws that we cannot change or control.

10.13 am

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I think that the House will be grateful to the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) for introducing the Bill and giving us an opportunity of addressing the most important issue that has come before us during the lifetime of this Parliament, which will shortly end.

The House will also be grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the clarity and passion with which he argued his case. Of the many points that he made, with which I am substantially in agreement, one of the most telling was about obedience to the rule of law. We obey the laws of our country, even those with which we profoundly disagree, because we know that the representatives of the British people have made that law and that it is always open to them to change that law, and that behind the representatives of the British people stand the British people themselves.

One of the things that distinguish such a law from one made under European authority is that we cannot change European law or repeal it. Therefore, the link between Ministers, Members of Parliament and the electorate is broken. Laws are made in Europe by unaccountable, unelected officials and by a Council of Ministers making majority decisions. I would not be satisfied even if the European Community were to transform its institutions so that all its laws were made by an elected European Parliament. I would not accept it, because those Members of the European Parliament are not the representatives of the British people. We would be only a small minority in that Parliament. No one should have the right to pass laws that are binding on the British people unless they can be dismissed by the British people. That is a fundamental law and should be a fundamental principle of our constitution.

I thank the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills for the concise form and penetration of the Bill. He has managed, in a few words, to address two major points, the first of which is the role of the referendum, which offers one of the few possibilities to remedy a fundamental weakness in our constitution. We have no written constitution and no procedures to protect and entrench features of our national and constitutional life. Everything can be changed by a simple majority. Many other countries, as we know, have quite elaborate procedures requiring a majority of two thirds for changes in constitutional matters and arrangements, often backed up with public referendums.

We have no such defence. Indeed, previously we did not need them, because only this generation of British parliamentary representatives has contemplated handing to others the great prizes of national independence, self-government and the rule of law under our own elected representatives. It would not have occurred to a previous generation to hand to others that which we prize most greatly and have given to other countries throughout the world in the past 50 years. That is the novelty of the proposition, against which, because we did not think it conceivable, we have no defences. A referendum is a major constitutional device for defending the rights of the British people and our constitution.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the referendum will not be a defence unless there are clear rules to prevent one side from pouring millions of pounds into its campaign, which in 1975 resulted in a prejudiced, biased, unfair provision of information for people to make a judgment? It is important to ensure that the referendum is genuinely a defence and not a device.

Mr. Shore: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Veterans of that great battle in 1975 will be well aware of the inadequacies of the arrangements that were made and the vast weight of money that helped enormously to distort the results of the vote. I am certain that we are now sufficiently experienced to devise new and more effective rules to ensure that if and when a referendum takes place it will be far fairer and will therefore give people a much better

chance genuinely to express their views.The other point that I find so helpful and so pertinent is that the Bill addreises the most important issue of this Parliament—the Maastricht treaties. It does not deal with all treaties but with those of the European Community and those that might amend or extend them. In particular, it deals with those treaties that might

"further diminish the Authority of the Queen in Parliament to regulate the affairs of the United Kingdom."

That regulation of our affairs is, of course, an all-embracing term and includes the power to legislate, the right to raise taxes and authorise expenditure and the right to determine the internal and external policies of the United Kingdom.

I shall deal with just two major questions. The first that must be asked, because it brings out the relevance and importance of the Bill, is whether the Maastricht treaty diminishes the authority of the Queen in Parliament, of the House of Commons or of elected Members of this House. Does it or does it not?

I preface my remarks on this issue by saying that no one can read the Maastricht treaty without concluding that it is a major extension of the Community's authority over the United Kingdom. I shall not dwell for too long on why it has made a major shift from what was previously the dominant view that Europe should be a Europe de patrie to the new, clear, open, naked confession that it is to be a federal union or a union of Europe, but the shift has taken place. The historical factors that have most influenced the change are, in my view, the reunification of Germany, the fear of German leaders of their own power if it is not bridled by those of a European federal state and France's fear that unless Germany is so bridled, it could possibly again become a danger to France. That has produced the extraordinary historical change in the thrust of French foreign policy. That and the Germany thrust have given tremendous weight to the drive towards a federal union.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with what seems to be the most widely held opinion among federalists in Europe that perhaps the most significant thing about the Maastricht treaty is that it does the very opposite of that which the right hon. Gentleman is now describing, because it builds on European political co-operation which, as he knows, is intergovernmental? It seeks to entrench the common foreign security policy and interior justice matters as intergovernmental and therefore does precisely the opposite of what he says.

Mr. Shore: My best answer to the right hon. Gentleman is to remind him of some of what is in the treaty. I understand that it was the Government's aim as far as possible to make certain aspects of the Maastricht treaty reflect intergovernmental arrangements rather than those of the main treaty of Rome with all its supernational apparatus. I understand that that was the aim, but it has been only very partially accomplished.

Let us consider the question in which the right hon. Gentleman is perhaps most interested, that of foreign and defence policy. But first, what about the general thrust of the treaty itself? Article A states:

"This Treaty marks a new stage in the process of creating an ever closer Union among the peoples of Europe".

Incidentally, it was only the British who knocked out the words "a federal vocation" and replaced them with "ever closer union". No other country fought for that, but that is a minor point.

Secondly, article B states:

"The Union"—

undefined—

"shall set itself the following objectives"

and it proceeds to list a number, including that of asserting "its identity on the international scene, in particular through the implementation of a common foreign and security policy including the eventual framing of a common defence policy".

The treaty goes on:

"The Union and its Member States shall define and implement a common foreign and security policy . . . The Member States shall support the Union's external and security policy actively, unreservedly, in the spirit of loyalty and mutual solidarity . . . and shall refrain from any action which is contrary to the interests of the Union or likely to impair its effectiveness as a cohesive force in international relations."

It continues:

"In international organisations and at international conferences where not all the Member States participate, those which do take part shall uphold the common position."

As we know, the Council decides, especially on the subject of joint action. I understand that it is not entirely a matter of majority voting, but only where joint actions are agreed. Once joint actions are agreed, that is what happens. But let us read the treaty against the background of the general declaration of intent which is to establish a common foreign policy.

I agree that the issue of defence is still less developed than that of foreign policy, but the treaty states:

"The common foreign and security policy shall include all questions related to the security of the Union including the eventual framing of a common defence policy, which might in time lead to a common defence."

Mr. Favell: What the right hon. Gentleman is saying is very important. Does he recall that during Foreign Office questions replies almost invariably start with the words "Having consulted our European partners" or "After discussions with our European partners"?

Mr. Shore: I am having trouble hearing.

Mr. Favell: Almost invariably replies to Foreign Office questions begin "Having consulted our European partners" or "Having spoken to our European partners". We no longer have an independent foreign policy.

Mr. Shore: That is a major extension, and I do not think that it is open to serious dispute.

Foreign policy is one of the matters that distinguish a state. If we have now joined a union which claims an international personality and interests which must be defended by a common security and foreign policy, clearly it is claiming to be a new state. It is a quasi-state, if not an entirely established one. The direction is quite clear. As if to make it certain that it is not misunderstood, the treaty states at the end that there shall be a further intergovernmental conference in 1996 to push further the purposes of the union. We know very well that the pressures that were partly resisted in the recent negotiations in Maastricht will be resumed with ever-greater force in the years ahead.

Foreign and defence policy is one of the characteristics of sovereignty. If one is not in charge of one's external relations and of defence, that is an enormous transfer of power and an enormous surrender of sovereignty.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): Although my right hon. Friend and I have parted company on a number of issues related to the European Community in recent years, during the earlier years of my parliamentary career he and I stood side by side in the great defence debate which once troubled our party. On our defence of NATO, we were of identical mind.

The North Atlantic treaty, which is to do with the defence of the nations that have subscribed to that treaty, applies in the case of an attack on any one member of the treaty organisation. In that case, all the forces of all the countries will be committed to a central military command. Is not that conceding the absolute sovereignty that goes along with defence? If that is the basis on which my right hon. Friend is arguing now, surely we conceded such sovereignty in 1949 when we signed the North Atlantic treaty.

Mr. Shore: The North Atlantic treaty was a treaty of enormous importance and I agree with my hon. Friend that we should play our full part in it. It laid on those nations who signed it the obligation to come to the aid of each other if they were attacked or under threat of attack. However, my hon. Friend has failed to see the distinction between conventional treaties, of which NATO is one, and treaties of a very special kind such as those on the European Community. To me, the essence of the argument is this. After 40 years of NATO we are utterly free, without any difficulties, to withdraw from it or to amend it. For example, when de Gaulle came to power, the French fundamentally changed their view about the unified command. They expelled the headquarters of NATO from Fontainebleau, so that it moved to Brussels, and withdrew their armed forces from the combined command without any sanction being brought against them.

I add one further point, which goes to the heart of the matter. Our obligations under the NATO treaty have not led to the imposition of a single piece of legislation on the British people, whereas through the treaties with Europe —my hon. Friend must recognise this—for the first time in our history, we have handed over to others the right to make the laws of England. We did not do that with NATO and we have not done it with any other treaty.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To add power to what the right hon. Gentleman is saying, may I point out that NATO does not contend that it is irrevocable and irreversible? These key phrases should stick in our gullets. The EC document is trying to bind future generations as well as this generation. There is a fundamental difference between irrevocable and irreversible treaties and the ordinary treaties that we have entered. The treaty needs reading, and it would have helped if the Labour Front Bench team had read it before committing the party so vehemently to it.

Mr. Shore The hon. Gentleman has made clear the uniqueness of the European Community treaty and what it means for Parliament. I am grateful to him for reinforcing my point.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Shore: No, I will not, because I must make progress.

Other policies besides foreign and defence policy are involved. We may differ across the Floor of the House on the policies that we adopt towards immigration and asylum. Those difficult questions are the subject of considerable debate and must be decided by the elected representatives of the people of the United Kingdom and not by any European authority. The new provisions in the part of the treaty dealing with home affairs policy threaten transfer of such powers, and that is not acceptable. It is one of the essential features of national sovereignty, independence and self-government that the Government, of Britain in this case, should have the right to decide who should come into this country, to live and to work here, and to settle here. We should not hand over that power to the European Community.

The third feature that is crucial to the reality of sovereignty is that the country has a currency of its own and a central bank responsive to the elected Government. The Maastricht treaty, which is on economic and monetary union, is deliberately and openly designed to bring about the unification of the currencies of Europe into one single currency. I doubt whether any hon. Member does not recognise that if that happens, we shall be abandoning all possibility of regulating the British economy within our own country. We shall have lost exchange rate policy, interest rate policy and control over our national bank. Through the limitations on the public sector borrowing requirement and other policies, we shall be subject to external government in respect of how much we are able to borrow. It is one of the signs of a state that it possesses a central bank and a currency of its own, and it is impossible to govern without them. That power will be transferred from Britain to the European Community.

I want finally to emphasise the point about the creation of a union and the citizenship of that union. We do not know what that means. It has never been explained—it was hardly mentioned in the debates that we had on the Maastricht treaty—but I assume that it means something and I assume that it means that, as citizens, we have not only rights but obligations, or that those obligations would follow rapidly from the acceptance of such a citizenship of the union. Do British citizens realise that they are becoming citizens of a European union? Do they realise, that, as a result, great privileges are being given to the population of the European Community in respect of entry to this country? I do not think that they have woken up to that fact.

These are the features of a sovereign state and these features are being acquired by the European Community. Having, I hope, established the nature of the process which Maastricht carries so far forward, and having shown that it would

"diminish the Authority of the Queen in Parliament"

and of the House of Commons, I hope that we can move quickly to agree that, in such circumstances, there must be direct consultation with the British people and that we must have, directly, their authority to proceed in this way.

It would be an outrage if the British people, who have defended their liberties and independence—after all, self-government is the first freedom—were to find themselves deprived of these great rights by a process of signing a treaty and obtaining a simple majority in the House of Commons. It would have the most deplorable effects not only on Parliament but on the people's view of the House of Commons and their elected representatives and it would undermine the rule of law, because law would no longer be based on a legitimate process of government

and legislation by the representatives of the people. I warmly endorse the Bill and I hope that we shall give it our approval this afternoon.

10.37 am

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): One of the most difficult challenges for a Member of Parliament is to try to refute the eloquence and persuasion of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), especially when added to that is a passionate and thoughtful speech by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). However, I shall seek to do so because I think that the Bill is misguided and that it would be an error for the House to give it a Second Reading. In favour as I am, generally, of guillotines and the timetabling of Bills, I think that this Bill is an exception and I hope that it will be considered at great length today, and in Committee if it gets that far. It is important that all its provisions should be analysed in great detail.

It is disappointing, to say the least, that my hon. Friend should ask for a referendum on this issue. Following the Maastricht negotiations, the Government delivered a result that was in the best interests of Britain and sought to take account of people's real fears about the growth of a federal state in Europe and about too much power being conceded to the European Communities.

The agreement was forged following a considerable amount of public debate and after the House had debated the issues on many occasions. It is fallacious to suggest that the public and the House did not know what was going on. In the six months preceding the Maastricht agreement, we talked of little else. The House and the public had plenty of opportunities to understand what was involved.

A paradox is inherent in the constitutional purism of which we have heard today. Wherein lies sovereignty? Are we really kidding ourselves that we shall achieve something by being isolationist? I imagine that many of those who support the Bill hope that, if the matter were put to a referendum, the British public would say a firm no. Do they really believe that by going it alone and not taking part in the economic and political development of the European Community we shall enhance our sovereignty? What sort of world are we living in? Do those who support the Bill really believe that we shall be able to influence our exchange rate, interest rate, rate of inflation, public expenditure and prosperity if we do not take part in the European Community?

It is because I believe passionately that Britain's membership of the European Community will deliver a better standard of living to the people whom I represent that I support our membership of it. I am no starry-eyed European—nor am I a constitutional adventurist. I want those whom I represent to have a higher standard of living. The bottom line must be the prosperity that Europe can deliver. That is why I generally support movements towards greater economic and monetary union.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: But all that the Bill proposes is that we should trust the people. We should ask the people and put the arguments to them.

Mr. Nelson: That is true of all referendums, and I do not rule out referendums on all subjects, but we have every right—indeed, we have a responsibility—to be selective about the issues that we put to a referendum.

Throughout history, rederendums have been called for and not held. There are plenty of examples. At the end of the last century, the Liberal Unionists wanted a referendum on home rule for Ireland. Like Stanley Baldwin, Joseph Chamberlain wanted one on tariff reform. Even Winston Churchill called for a referendum on whether the coalition Government should be kept going until the Japanese were defeated. We have had calls for referendums on numerous issues, but most have been rejected. It was not until the mid-1970s that referendums started to be held: on whether Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom, on devolution in Scotland and Wales, and—the only real example of a nationwide referendum—on the subject of our remaining in the European Community. If one starts holding referendums, where does one stop? The more referendums we have, the greater the demand for them will be. People will want them held on more and more subjects. Why not have a referendum on the bomb, on hanging and on numerous other issues, and not merely on constitutional issues?

Referendums are not part of the evolution of our parliamentary democracy. It is no part of our tradition and system of government that, on every issue on which there is contention in the House, we give the people an opportunity, through a referendum, to express their views. We are charged by our electorate with the responsibility to try to divine the common good. The electorate has opportunities—as it will have within a matter of months—to pass judgment on whether we are right or wrong.

Mr. Spearing: The hon. Gentleman will be surprised to learn that I understand and agree with much that he is saying. He represents a particular area, and the alternative method to a referendum would surely be for him to obtain from his electorate a mandate on certain serious matters. Can he tell us what mandate he or his predecessor obtained for the approval of the Single European Act and, presumably, the endorsement of both the application and the agreement that the Prime Minister obtained at Maastricht? Can he tell us that chapter and verse?

Mr. Nelson: I have spelt out clearly to my electors in Chichester exactly where I stand and what I want. If the hon. Gentleman doubts it, I remind him that, in 1978, I tabled the first early-day motion calling for rapid progress towards economic and monetary union, which was signed by numerous hon. Members, many of them now Ministers. Twelve years elapsed before what I called for then was achieved and that may seem rather slow progress, but no one can accuse me of not stating my position clearly to my electors and not seeking a mandate, and I predict that I shall get a reasonable mandate from my constituents on this issue when I put it to them shortly.

What are my objections to a referendum in this context? First, referendums are often defective because they are snapshots of public opinion and public opinion moves on. I believe that, on the EC and its development, opinions have changed not just among the public but in the House. As the arguments have been heard and as negotiations have proceeded, and as my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have reassured the public and explained more clearly why it is in the public interest to forge such an agreement, public opinion has

[Mr. Nelson]

changed. Many people who were understandably hostile to everything connected with the Common Market now realise that it is in our interests.

The ordinary man in the street, who had many of the reservations that I still have about the European Community, now has a much more favourable opinion of it. He shared my concern about the common agricultural policy, about wasted expenditure within the European Commission and about every aspect of life being controlled from Brussels. I still have those concerns, but I know that it is better to be in there, preventing things from happening, than to stay out.

The ordinary man in the street has moved on. Let us take the man in Thanet—Thanet man. Thanet man has moved on. He was very concerned about the European Community having federal powers that were too great, but Thanet man realised once the agreement was forged that it was far better to support the Government, to come onside and to work within the European Community and give greater credibility to the structures provided to represent him than he had in the past. Thanet man is now on the Government's side, and it would be a great disappointment if a referendum on this issue, or the opening up of divisions on this question, should once more lead Thanet man into a period of uncertainty and fear, given the great opportunity that we have to go forward to greater prosperity and representation in Europe.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): I am dazzled by my hon. Friend's concentration on Thanet man. As the only representative of the species present today, I want to make two points. First, although I accept the part of my hon. Friend's argument that says that the caravan is moving on, one of the reasons why it is moving on is that we had a referendum on the Common Market, as it then was, in 1976, which clarified many people's views. Secondly, bearing in mind that referendum and those on Scottish and Welsh devolution, I do not see why my hon. Friend should be so alarmed as to think that the evolution of referendums should suddenly halt in the 1990s and why he should be so afraid to test the complexities of Maastricht against the views of ordinary people in this country. I support the Bill because I believe that those ordinary people should be asked to express their opinions through the only mechanism available.

Mr. Nelson: My hon. Friend makes his position clear in his usual persuasive way. I remain concerned about referendums because they are a snapshot of public opinion. Moreover, my hon. Friend would be on stronger ground if he said that there was a case for holding a referendum before the introduction of the legislation that gave effect to the Single European Act rather than on this issue. Other right hon. Members, including right hon. Ladies, who have been present in this debate to support the Bill did not at that time propose a referendum on the Single European Act. It ill behoves them to support today's Bill.

I believe that the more we have referendums, the more it brings into question the sovereignty of this House. It undermines the repute, standing and influence of this House if we consistently put to the public issues about which we are elected to decide. What question will be asked? We all know that a particular result can often be achieved by the way in which the question is put. There is no certainty that, in respect of this Bill, the question could be phrased in such a way as to divine a fair test of public opinion.

However, I have not yet made the most persuasive argument against referendums generally. I believe that the most persuasive argument is that they are, and can be, a cruel hoax and confidence trick on the public because they often extricate a particular issue from their consequences and from the totality of Government policy. By putting a particular issue to a plebiscite, one can deliver a result which may be disastrous in terms of overall policy. That is very important because, on issues such as that contained in the Bill, we must consider the issue in terms of management of the economy, future influence over our own affairs and our own influence in the world. We cannot consider the issue simply in isolationist terms as a referendum would necessarily regard it.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): My hon. Friend is making a brilliant and very persuasive case about the dangers of referendums because, as he said, they can be snapshots of public opinion; they can concentrate wrongly on particular issues and people can be misled. Does my hon. Friend believe that it is wise for us to continue the practice of having general elections, because the same arguments can be made about them? In view of my hon. Friend's valid criticisms, should we not stop having general elections?

Mr. Nelson: I would not go as far as that. Perhaps my hon. Friend fails to understand the point that I was making before he intervened. In a general election, people have an opportunity to consider all Government policies, while in a referendum people have an opportunity to consider only one, but one that might have implications for the rest of the Government policy. That is why there should generally be a self-denying ordinance exercised in respect of referendums.

What was achieved at Maastricht offers enormous opportunities for this country, both politically and economically. It is crazy to suggest that somehow we could go it alone, be better off and have magical self determination politically, economically and in international affairs. It is not right to leap enthusiastically into a constitutional federal structure. It is not right to proceed without some suspicion or cynicism about the ethics and practical objectives of the European Community. Unless we are prepared to play our part in Europe and to be, in the words of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, at the heart of Europe, we will not be able to deliver to the people we represent the standard of living that they deserve or meet their aspirations and provide for them the influence in world events and forums for which they had elected us to this place.

I am in favour of our having that influence. I am in favour of moves beyond what has been agreed. I hope that within a matter of weeks, after the next general election, we will move to the narrow rate band of the exchange rate mechanism because there is a strong economic case for that. We have to keep up with the timetable leading to the possibility in 1997 of our voluntarily, with other countries, signing up to a single currency. As a result of the criteria set down by the agreement, we will have had to have been in the narrow rate band for two years. That means that we will have had to have been within that band by 1995. In

effect, whatever party is in government will have about 18 months to take that decision. It would be better to take that decision sooner rather than later because there will be a mass inflow of capital and a more immediate and sharper decline in interest rates and inflation.

Mr. Gill: My hon. Friend has emphasised the importance of being at the top table to argue the case for Britain and to persuade the other nations to adopt more of our methods. He referred to the common agricultural policy. Is he aware that on 1 January the last vestige of the way in which this country manages its agricultural affairs disappeared with the ending of the sheepmeat variable premium scheme? Over 15 years we have influenced the way in which the CAP is conducted only in a minuscule way.

Mr. Nelson: There is a good deal in what my hon. Friend has said. I represent a large agricultural constituency. My farmers may not like what I have to say, but I am deeply concerned about the operation of the CAP and the amount of money that we provide for its various schemes. However, it is not enough simply to withdraw from the CAP, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) would agree. We must have an alternative system.

If the public were asked in a referendum, "Should we come out of the CAP?" the majority might well say yes. However, if we also asked, "Are you in favour of paying more to farmers through a national subsidy deficiency scheme?", they would probably say no to that, because that would cost more money.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Does my hon. Friend believe that the British public would say no to having their grocery bills reduced by £18 a week if we did away with the CAP? That is what it costs ordinary people.

Mr. Nelson: I understand what my hon. Friend has said, but I am sure that she is not suggesting that if we were to pull out of the CAP we would not, in some way, support our own farming industry. Is she suggesting that we should do away with any form of deficiency payments? If she is prepared to preside over the consequences for British farming of supplying our own food, she must take responsibility for that. However, bearing in mind the kind of constituency that I represent, she will understand that I cannot agree with that.

Mr. Favell: My hon. Friend has a long history of supporting the European Community cause. Therefore, I found it particularly interesting to hear him say that he felt that the CAP was little short of a disaster. If he did not use those words, that was the impression that he gave. If he is right, why should a common industrial policy, common social policy or common currency work any better?

Mr. Nelson: Many aspects of the European Community have worked extremely well. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) might agree that there are benefits from customs union and the Single European Act and the single market. I do not know whether he would go as far as to accept that there are benefits from regional aid, but I believe that there have been benefits. I believe that the economic success of the exchange rate mechanism for this country and for other European countries, which has provided more stability and certainty, has been a real economic advantage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport may not agree, but there are areas about which I believe, as passionately as my opponents disagree, that it is in our self-interest and in our financial interest to be in there at the head of the discussions and to exercise influence over the issues which, at the end of the day, will affect the standard of living of our constituents.

For those reasons, it would be an error of judgment to give the Bill a Second Reading today. This is not an issue upon which to have a referendum. Referendums have their problems. If we were to grant the Bill a Second Reading today, it would be a slap in the face for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and his ministerial colleagues who have achieved so much in balancing the fears and aspirations in respect of the Maastricht agreement, in extending British influence within the Community and in opening up the economic and political opportunities that the agreement presents. All that would be brought into question. In view of our commitment to the European Community, having already had a referendum on the issue, if we were to have yet another on every aspect of progress in Europe, it would be widely misunderstood in the Community and greatly resented in this country in particular.

For all those reasons, I have misgivings about the eloquent and sincere views of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills. I hope that the House will put the matter behind it and, instead, will place greater emphasis on playing our part in Europe rather than adopting the scorched-earth policy of thinking again and trying to prevent progress towards fulfilling the aspirations that many of us still share.

11 am

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) is to be congratulated at the very least on giving us a chance to debate a constitutional issue. We have far too few opportunities to do so. I thought that it was a shame that the hon. Gentleman, in his eloquent speech, did not dwell on the constitutional implications of his Bill, but used it as a vehicle to bash Europe.

That there are two issues is demonstrated by the fact that, so far, we have had anti-Europe, pro-referendum speeches. We have just listened to a pro-Europe, anti-referendum speech, and right hon. and hon. Members are about to hear a pro-Europe, pro-referendum speech. I have little doubt that, later, we will hear an anti-Europe, anti-referendum speech. Perhaps that analysis illustrates that there are two issues for consideration—not just the European one.

I start by offering an opinion that is shared by a great many people in this country. I cannot claim that it represents the majority view, because I do not know that—perhaps because we have not had a referendum on the issue.

What has wounded Europe most in the 20th century at any rate has been nationalism. What has killed the most people in Europe in the 20th century has been nationalism. The worst expression of nationalism has been totalitarianism. There are no important examples in which co-operation between democratic nation states has led to anything other than eventual peace, good sense, and joint developments in not only economic and military terms but cultural terms.

[Mr. Alex Carlile]

I was born just after the last war, and my generation has seen opportunities that were not available to my parents' generation. My father, now sadly deceased, was born in central Europe in 1904. He told me fascinating but frightening stories of the first world war. My mother, who fought in the Warsaw uprising, has told me horrific stories of the second world war. Those stories—they are not made-up, but factual—are founded upon the divisions that occurred in Europe because of narrow, nationalistic feelings.

The greatest threat to the peace and stability of Europe today, and perhaps of the world, exists in that part of central and eastern Europe where there have been welcome moves to democratisation. I hope that those countries will become successful democracies and that they will be welcomed into—or at least come under the umbrella of—the European Community. I applaud the initiative of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) in creating the know-how fund, which has done much to help, for example, the people of Poland—a country in which I take a particular interest. However, if we fail to help the countries of the Baltic, and the Balkans in particular, to democratise, there will be an outbreak of nationalism that will cause great debility in Europe.

Nothing but good can come of intergovernmental co-operation, and the more co-operation the better. We heard an outburst of, if not anti-German feeling, caution about Germany. I share with many in this country—I say this frankly, and it should be said in the House from time to time—misgivings about the collective temperament of the Germans. However, we will not ensure that Germany remains our partner if we become isolated from that country. Germany is the most powerful nation in Europe in economic terms and it will probably become the most powerful in political terms. Insulating ourselves from Germany is more likely to lead to a repetition of the horrors of the earlier part of the century than the avoidance of them. If we are members of the same economic, political, and defence union as Germany—I do not use the word "union", which appears in the Maastricht treaty, with any reluctance—we will ensure the future peace of western Europe.

Some hon. Members do less than justice to the people—even to the Governments—of such countries as France and the Netherlands. No country has a more noble European history than the Netherlands. No country has greater determination not to be part of Germany than the Netherlands. We do ill service to our view of France and the Netherlands, for example, if we pretend that they are in some way less interested in their own sovereignty and security than we are in ours. I venture to suggest that the 11 other members of the Community have, if anything, better reasons for protecting their own sovereignty and national interest than we have, because they suffered even more in the last war at least than the United Kingdom.

Mr. Cash: Does the hon. and learned Gentleman agree that it is not just nationalism that is the problem, but nationalism without democracy? I was glad that the hon. and learned Gentleman suggested that we should encourage eastern European countries to move toward greater democracy, but does he agree that they are concerned about the direction that the European federation is taking? That would cut at the roots of the freedom and democracy that those countries sought and want to sustain.

Mr. Carlile: I do not understand the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question. As to the first part, we would have a greater problem if there were nationalism without democracy—but we would still have a problem if there were nationalism even with a measure of democracy. I remind the hon. Gentleman and others who hold a strongly anti-European Community opinion—and of course I respect their right to that view, but disagree with it—that paragraph 1 of article F of the Maastricht treaty states unequivocally that

"The Union shall respect the national identities of its Member States"—

every one of those words counts; "Member States" count as much as "national identities"—

"whose systems of government are founded on the principles of democracy."

The implication seems to have crept into the debate that, in some way, the European Community might tolerate one of its member states abandoning democracy, for whatever reason. I do not believe that is the case. It is entrenched in the treaty that one of the prerequisites for belonging to the European Community is to be democratic. That is of itself the highest demonstration of its values and virtues.

The Community is an organisation of member states in union, each with its own sovereignty intact. It creates, too, a different type of constitutional structure. We may have to look for a word different from "sovereignty" to describe that structure. I do not, however, believe for one moment that we have abandoned our sovereignty or that constitutional theorists seriously have a case for thinking so either.

The European Community therefore presents an overwhelming political and economic case. It does ill to the debate if, as we heard earlier, it is turned into a discussion about whether we should have a single currency. We will have a single currency. The luddites on both sides of the House might as well recognise that fact once and for all. There is hardly a respected business person in the country who does not want a single currency and—despite the braying of their backwoodsmen—the Government appear close to recognising that.

Mr. Spearing: I agree with much of the tone of the hon. and learned Gentleman's remarks, but surely he is guilty of introducing a major non-sequitur in talking about the entrenchment of democracy. In Britain it is the House and our freedoms that defend our constitution and guarantee our democracy. If legislation is to be Communitywide, as indeed it is under the single market, and if there is to be a single currency—which the hon. Gentleman just espoused—a single economic policy and a single commercial policy towards third countries, does that system need something which is centrally democratic in order to entrench democracy in it? In effect, the union would then become a new democratic nation that transcended existing nationalities and the existing democratic institutions of this and other countries.

Mr. Carlile: With great respect, the hon. Gentleman is guilty of muddled thinking. The entrenchment of democracy is an internal matter. Each member state has its democracy entrenched in its own constitution, except in the case of the United Kingdom. I believe that we should

have a constitution in which democracy is entrenched. Our democracy is entrenched in the conventions of the House and——

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): And in its rituals.

Mr. Carlile: And in the rituals of the House, as the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) says—but that is a fuzzy way in which to entrench something as important as democracy.

The Maastricht treaty reinforces our determination to retain democracy in Britain by telling us that if we abandon democracy, we will no longer be members of the European Community. That is good for Britain, which —it will come as no surprise to the House to hear me say this, as a Liberal Democrat—has the greatest democratic deficit in Europe. *[Interruption.]* I will resist the temptation that presents itself to Liberal Democrats on Fridays, to talk about proportional representation.

I support the Bill because it is right that when great constitutional issues are debated, the public should be consulted. The Bill is a consultative measure only. The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills is wrong in his view of what the British public would be likely to say. However pro-European one is—even if one is a federalist—there is nothing to fear from consulting the British public about the European Community. There is plenty of evidence from opinion polls and elsewhere that they would support the Community.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: I did not say what would be the outcome of the referendum. I am assiduous in saying that that is a judgment for the people. My conclusions are perhaps self-evident, but I have reached no conclusion about what decision the public would make. That is the essence of the Bill. It gives authority and, therefore, confidence to the movement forward in Europe. If we do not hold a referendum, we shall be for ever stymied in the present arrangement, in which there is no clear affirmation from the people that we have followed the correct process.

Mr. Carlile: Perhaps my comment was more appropriate to Conservative Members generally than to the hon. Gentleman.

I turn to the important principle underlying the Bill. The House need never fear the public of Britain, unless it ignores them. The Bill does not insist that Parliament should follow the advice of the public in a referendum. Such advice would of course be given following a lengthy and fair campaign on the issue, but there is no doubt that that could be achieved.

There are plenty of countries around the world where referendums take place and we even have a little experience of them in Britain. We can trust the public to give honest advice after the issues have been explained to them.

There is currently far too much speculation about public opinion. It happens on an almost daily basis, sometimes even twice a day. We now have not only polls but polls of polls. They are perhaps a result of our failure to consult the public properly on many different matters.

The Government of the time were right to consult the people of Scotland and of Wales about proposed constitutional changes affecting those parts of the United Kingdom, and it is a great pity that those precedents have not been followed more often. There should be another referendum on decentralisation in Wales, where my constituency lies. I believe that if such a referendum were held today, there would be a different result from that of 1976.

It would not be right to hold a referendum on matters that concern merely controversial Government policy. But it is essential, if the House is to command anything like public respect—there is little enough of it for us at present —that we consult the public on matters that are judged, preferably independently, to be of constitutional significance. The Bill is only one in a large bag of constitutional tools that we ought to entrench in a written constitution.

We should have a Bill of Rights, proportional representation and an elected second chamber. We should have independent appointment of judges, and a constitutional court having responsibility for deciding whether a matter affects our constitutional arrangements in such a way that the public should be consulted in a referendum.

I hope that in what remains of the debate, there will be more discussion not only of the European issue, which is of course vitally important for Britain, but of the wider principles that the hon. Gentleman has included in his Bill, which are worthy of much greater discussion.

11.19 am

Mr. James Cran (Beverley): I was not quite ready to speak. I find it unusual to be called so early in a debate and I am especially grateful on this occasion.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): My apologies to the hon. Gentleman. I shall look elsewhere.

Mr. Cran: No, you need not apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am delighted because at least it allows me to speak on the subject, which I have been unable to do until now, despite the fact that there have been two debates on the Maastricht summit on which the Bill is centred. That illustrates the fact that important issues facing the United Kingdom are not given enough time for debate in the House, or at least not for people like me.

I genuinely congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) on introducing the Bill, which, I say from the outset, I support, and on the manner in which he did it. I am also immensely impressed with the manner in which the House has reacted. There has been far too much yah-boo politics, especially in the past few weeks. There are far too many irritating practices—to put it mildly and gently—on and between these Benches. It is refreshing that for once everyone has sat back and listened to the arguments. We all undoubtedly listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills, but I for one was perfectly prepared to listen to the counter-arguments; thereby one learns a little more about the issue, and I have.

The Bill is centred on the Maastricht agreement. The memory dims and I suspect that that is exactly what the two Front Benches want to happen. We will come back after the general election—whenever it is—and say to ourselves that the Maastricht agreement was not so bad after all.

Mr. Cash: My hon. Friend must be joking.

Mr. Cran: The Government and the Opposition would be joking if they thought that, but I have a feeling that that

[Mr. Cran]

is what they are thinking. A number of us are not prepared to allow the Government or the Opposition Front Bench to take that view.

What was decided at Maastricht was as clear as crystal and I shall not forget it for a long time. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills put it succinctly when introducing the Bill. He said that the matter is of some constitutional importance and I agree. It is not like this, that or the next Bill which comes before the House. Although Bills are extremely important to the interests that they affect, the important point is that I and other hon. Members can affect them. I can speak either for or against them. However, that may not be the case with the range of legislation, proposals and whatever else that may come out of the European Community—proposals which will, I fear, come at even greater speed and quantity if the Maastricht summit is eventually agreed in the House.

The agreement is definitely a question of the governance of the United Kingdom and is no less than that. That is why my hon. Friend for Aldridge-Brownhills was correct to introduce the Bill. I start from the same premise as my hon. Friend. I was sent here by no other device than the people of Beverley, who decided that I should come to the House. I represent them for the term of this Parliament and, at the end of that term, they will decide whether I stay. I think that they will probably decide that I should stay at the next general election—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—and I am grateful for that show of confidence from my colleagues, which is not less than I deserve. Obviously, that is going to happen, but it should not be taken for granted and I do not take it for granted. Nor should any of us.

The electorate sent me here to exercise their sovereignty. It is not for me to hand that away without even having the courtesy of asking them what they think about it.

As with the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson), my electorate know in crystal-clear terms where I stand on this issue. I venture to suggest that my electorate do not wish the agreement to be quietly decided by the Government's majority vote and the whipping vote, when it is eventually debated in the House.

Mr. Nelson: That is not enough.

Mr. Cran: I agree. My electorate want to be asked about the Maastricht agreement and that is why I support the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester correctly spoke at some length about referendums, their advantages and disadvantages. It would be wrong for me to suggest that there are only advantages—there are both and we all know perfectly well what they are. However, I agree with the view of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). Whatever else I have discovered throughout my life, I know that I have infinite faith in the British people quietly to imbibe all the information given to them in their living rooms, by whatever means, and to come to a conclusion. It is insulting for any hon. Member to suggest that the British people are not intelligent enough to take in all the information and to come to a conclusion. They may come to what is, in my view, the wrong conclusion, but, none the less they are entitled to be given the right to do so.

In saying that, I again agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester who mentioned the question whether referendums should be used widely. Of course not. There are well-defined areas where many of us could agree that they should be used. Of course I am not in favour of referendums—of the sort they have in Switzerland—on whether we should have new doors on the town hall. Of course we will not go in for that. However, this issue is rather bigger than new doors for the town hall. It is rather more significant. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills said, it concerns the governance of this country.

I respectfully suggest to my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester that the order of importance shows which issues should be subject to referendums. I am confident that the Maastricht agreement should by this measure be subject to one organised for the purpose.

Until now, I have not been allowed to speak on the agreement. I am told—especially by the Government—that the treaty is self-contained, that all the caveats on it have been achieved, and that there are opt-out clauses and separate protocols, in particular the protocol on the social dimension. By those devices it is alleged we protect our sovereignty because the Government know perfectly well that there is a certain feeling about the subject in the House and in the country. They have tried to protect our interests by those devices. The question is whether they have succeeded. In my humble opinion, the Government have not. One must consider the intentions of all those people sitting round the table at the summit. I am perfectly clear about the intentions of some of the major players in that discussion. I do not think that they were round the table to get an agreement to the Maastricht summit merely to have a Europe made up of a confederation of sovereign states in the old 19th century view of sovereign states.

Alas, I am old enough to remember the debate when we first entered the Common Market. We debated the matter for several years, culminating in a referendum. Those in favour said—in retrospect it was a lot of soft soap—that we were not drifing into federalism, there would not be a European super-state, all decision making would remain in Parliament, and our electorates would decide. If those of us who are fairminded, which means all of us, look back at those statements—I remember the hon. Members who made them—and compare them with what has happened, we shall see chalk and cheese. I repeat that we were dealt a load of soft soap. We were on a slippery slope then and we are on one now. We are at the Rubicon, which means that there is no going back if the treaty is agreed by the House. That is why I believe that my electorate should have the right to say what they think about crossing the Rubicon.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Can my hon. Friend name a single enthusiast for the federal goal of Europe, in Europe or in this country, who believes that the Maastricht treaty has been a step in that direction?

Mr. Cran: I understand my right hon. Friend's question, but I was concentrating on the wide gap in the original debate between what was said and what eventually occurred, and I was arguing that I fear that the same will happen again. I said that it would depend on what the parties involved in the agreement were saying. In this regard I must admit that I am immensely unimpressed by the fact that no hon. Member has mentioned that Mr.

Kohl—who is rather more important in this matter because it is often said that the European Community, or union, will be dominated by the Germans—said clearly on 23 May 1991 at the Europa Institute in Edinburgh:

"Europe will be a federal Europe".

I am singularly uninterested in what some hon. Members may say about federalism, but I am very interested in what Mr. Kohl said.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I understand my hon. Friend's point about the past. It is probably true that, until recently, the whole thrust of the development of the European Community was toward a single structure or, as we call it, a federal structure. My hon. Friend will know that the word, "federal" means something different to Chancellor Kohl. However, one of the triumphs of the Maastricht treaty for the Government and the Prime Minister is that, far from bringing that debate to a federalist conclusion, it has opened up a debate and a prospect of a wider, intergovernmental Europe which I believe is more satisfactory to the instincts of the House and the British people and which, in due course, if we fight that argument robustly in Europe, will carry the day.

Mr. Cran: I have no difficulty in agreeing with my right hon. Friend that the Prime Minister went to Maastricht and hammered out a good deal—some would say a very fine deal. He understood perfectly well the feelings in the House. After the general election, however, hon. Members on both sides of the House may be freer to express their feelings on the issue, uninhibited no doubt by the proximity of a general election. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for the protocol, the social dimension and the fact that the United Kingdom is not, prima facie, totally committed to economic union. However, having agreed to the treaty in principle, we are on a slippery slope. Many of my hon. Friends are worried about that, too.

Mr. Favell: Perhaps I can help my hon. Friend and the Minister. It is true to say that the Maastricht treaty was not the federal finality that people such as President Mitterrand and the Chancellor Kohl wanted. However, in 1996, perhaps before the election after the forthcoming one, there will be more intergovernmental conferences and another treaty, which will put the final nail in the coffin for those who want an independent United Kingdom.

Mr. Cran: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Despite the fact that I was slightly abashed earlier to hear about his antecedents and where they came from, I still have the utmost confidence in him and implicitly trust his judgment. He is absolutely correct. The kernel of the issue is not only the slippery slope argument but, as he eloquently pointed out—I was going to discuss it later in my speech—the fact that there will be other intergovernmental conferences and agreements. By that device, the ratchet effect will proceed.

Mr. Garel-Jones *indicated dissent*——

Mr. Cran: The Minister shakes his head and I respect his view. However, he must understand that those who feel as I do fear that the ratchet effect will continue.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Surely my hon. Friend must share my confidence in the ability, not just of our party but of this Parliament and the British people, to win that argument in Europe. Of course, the argument goes on and some people in Europe still dream of a unitary super-state. There is nothing sinful about that. The Conservative party and Parliament as a whole are confident that we can win that debate, which is far from over. My hon. Friend will recall that, during the intergovernmental conference, the presidency presented a text that was a federalist tract. He will also recall that that text was supported by only two of 12 member states, so the argument is far from lost. We can and will win it.

Mr. Cran: My right hon. Friend is being characteristically winning and persuasive and using the precise language, so how in heaven's name could I possibly disagree with some parts of his proposition? Of course, I am confident that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Cabinet know where the marker points are in that argument, but I am less clear about what will happen once they leave the scene. There will be other faces who may take a different view about the whole proposition. Consequently, if as a Member of Parliament I give way now, that will open the door for someone in the future to say yes, notwithstanding the fact that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said no—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friends make compelling points. May I return, however, to my original argument about the Rubicon? I believe that I have a right, as do my constituents, to say yea or nay to that collection of proposals.

As has been pointed out, particularly by the Minister, the treaty has been tightly drawn. There is no question about that. Therefore, if one is simply to go on that fact, notwithstanding the protestations of some of my hon. Friends, one might simply say that we should proceed because of all the opt-out clauses and protocols. However, the intention is the important aspect and my view of the intentions of some of the major players in the Maastricht agreement is that, ultimately, they want what the treaty speaks of and what hon. Members who have already spoken have already alluded to—a European union. For goodness sake, let us all speak plain language. What does a European union mean if not that we all get together at this, that or the other conference to decide matters between us which might be different if we decided them separately?

Mr. Favell: A Scot would know what the word "union" means.

Mr. Cran: I shall not be put off by that.

There have already been perceptible changes in British foreign policy, where the United Kingdom might have taken one view—I think especially of Croatia or the Gulf—but its policy has been surreptitiously changed by European conferences. That is not to say that I am not in favour of reaching, as far as we can, a common position. However, if the United Kingdom does not agree with the common position, it should not proceed with it. I shall not continue for much longer, Madam Deputy Speaker, because several hon. Members wish to speak and, as always, I am conscious of that.

The issue was summed up by the *Financial Times* on 12 December 1991. Of course, the *Financial Times* is not the final arbiter of these matters; it merely takes an opinion, as we all take an opinion. However, it is a fairly sober and authoritative source of opinion. It said:

"The Maastricht Treaty is indeed the biggest milestone in the Community's 34-year history. It contains, among the goals cited in its preamble, many of the attributes—common citizenship, defence and money—of a potential Euro-superstate."

[Mr. Cran]

I would not go that far, but I go far enough to suggest that we are on a slippery slope. I want the United Kingdom to take its own decisions on all the major issues on defence, the economy and foreign affairs similar to which a sovereign state should take. That does not preclude co-operation with our European partners and, on that device, I am as good a European as anybody else. It is on that principle that I am delighted to support my hon. Friend the member for Aldridge-Brownhills, and I end as I began, by congratulating him.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Dykes: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The last four speeches lasted for 24, 23, 19 and 22 minutes respectively. Will you be making your customary appeal for brief speeches?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I think that the hon. Gentleman has done the job very nicely.

11.42 am

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): If not brief, I hope to be pungent and to the point. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) has left the Chamber. Although he may have honourably made clear his position on these matters to his electorate, the reason for this debate on a possible referendum is the fact that successive Governments—I am being neutral for the moment—did not seek any mandate from the electorate in the elections prior to the signing of the treaty of accession or the Single European Act—or, indeed, the signing of what is being called the treaty of Maastricht.

Unlike the hon. Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran), I am not delighted to be supporting the Bill, although reluctantly and for certain reasons I may do so. All referendums have many of the disadvantages that were referred to by the hon. Member for Chichester—the manoeuvrability of the question, the dangling of a hope or promise and the spectre of fear if one does say yes. Most important, does the person answering the question have a real understanding of the fundamentals or is he really answering another question, "Will you trust our Harold" or something like that? That was the reaction of many people in 1975. Were those who should be in the know aware at the time of the actual questions and issues?

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile)—who is not with us; I wish that he had stayed—claimed that democracy was entrenched in the United Kingdom and, he thought, unsatisfactorily in this House. At the time of that referendum, the same Harold Wilson—as he then was—quite properly relied on the unwritten Luxembourg agreement and said that no law could be passed in Brussels without the consent of a British Minister—but he had forgotten, as I had, that the common agricultural policy was then the subject of majority voting. If there had been a referendum that asked, "Are you prepared to enter the European Community, where the laws relating to agriculture, food prices and the whole of the relationship between the soil and the natural environment of the United Kingdom is to be decided by people not of our nationality beyond our shores?" I am confident that the answer would have been no.

Of course, it did not happen like that; the referendum did not ask that question. Therefore, I say to the hon. Member for Chichester and the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery that there cannot be proper democracy without proper debate and representative democracy as we have always had it—that is, a mandate from the people. I say to the hon. and learned Gentleman that a centralised, lawmaking machine, such as we have at the moment by treaty—and without Maastricht—means that the European Community can have democracy entrenched only if it is dealt with by central, not national, institutions.

Mr. Cash: What makes the hon. Gentleman believe that the average person in this country is not capable of making up his or her mind on such a matter? What might make the hon. Gentleman think that Members of Parliament, many of whom have not even seen the documents, let alone read them, would be in a better position to form a judgment on this question?

Mr. Spearing: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. For reasons that most of us understand, but which I do not have time to enunciate, the matter has not yet been debated in the House.

That brings me neatly to the next point mentioned by the hon. Member for Chichester and also by the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) on a radio programme this morning. I listened to him with some incredulity because usually I have some sympathy with his views on these matters. Surely we all agree that the debate, if that is what it is, on Maastricht has been about three matters—the desirability of economic and monetary union; the question of a British opt-out; and the social chapter. That debate was intra-party as much as it was wider.

There was no real understanding of the fundamentals that we were being asked to accept. Indeed, we may be asked to agree to the fundamentals shortly after the next election and perhaps before July is out—because any Government, and there could be four varieties within a few months, will surely want to have achieved some agreement on the treaty of Maastricht if only because they, whoever they might be, will hold the presidency. I question what proper debate there will be in Parliament before then. That is not to say that there should not be a passable longstop as well. The referendum is a safety longstop, although I have doubts about its efficacy.

I come now to a point that I hope will be dealt with soon by the Minister. In an exchange a few minutes ago, he claimed that the debate is about real intergovernmental co-operation and nothing to do with any deterministic stuff where the Commission will be influential and tell us what to do, with Mr. Delors riding high and so on—this is a new sort of treaty. I was about to say that that was the impression that he gave and I note that he is nodding his head. He has agreed to what I hope was not an exaggeration.

Who has really had a look at the yellow pages of the treaty? Beattie has not, has she? If there is to be a referendum, Beattie will be voting just as much as anybody else. The Government's presentation of the document is quite undemocratic. Inside this bundle of papers that I have with me, which arrived in the Vote Office only on Tuesday and is signed by the Foreign Secretary as the Queen's plenipotentiary, we find an extraordinary collection of legal jargon. We find a completely new treaty of union with lettered articles from A to S. Article G incorporates the whole of the treaty of Rome within the

new union treaty. Article J deals with the whole of our common foreign and security policy. Article K deals with justice and home affairs.

Mr. Garel-Jones *indicated assent.*

Mr. Spearing: I see the Minister nodding his head. We have an overarching treaty.

Mr. Garel-Jones *indicated assent.*

Mr. Spearing: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman nods.

In the past in conversations and in the press there has been talk of trunk and pillars. The Prime Minister told us that there was a great victory in ensuring that, instead of having everything under the treaty of Rome with the Commission playing a major part, we had some pillars outside the treaty. It looks as though the pillars have got mixed up in the trunk. I cannot see very much that is outside the scope of the union treaty—I should be interested to hear from the Minister what parts are. I may be wrong. This is an extremely difficult group of documents to get through.

We start with articles A to F of the common, overarching treaty of union. We then have a vast number, about 150, new articles to the treaty of Rome. Then we go on to the consequential amendments, which are probably not very important, to the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Atomic Energy Community. Then we get no fewer than 89 paragraphs of protocols to the treaty of Maastricht, which hang somewhere between the union treaty and the treaty of Rome. I should be obliged if the Minister would tell us which they are. We then have no fewer than 33 declarations. Altogether, that adds up to 300-odd new articles to the written constitution of the European Community. We must remember that some articles remain in its constitution, so the total is about 700 altogether. That is what we in this Chamber face over the coming months, yet we have not gone about revealing or discussing what is there at all well.

One major point—the vexed matter of subsidiarity—has caused a great deal of discussion. The Prime Minister and Conservative Members have raised subsidiarity up as a great safeguard. It is about time that we had it absolutely straight. Perhaps the Minister will comment on the exegesis that I will now attempt on article 3b of the amended treaty of Rome.

After referring to the Community, article 3b refers to "areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence." what commercial, monetary, economic, external commercial matters and so on do not fall within the exclusive competence of the EEC? We should have a list. Only those matters that are not within the Community's exclusive competence can be dealt with by subsidiarity. Article 3b continues that the Community shall act in those areas

"only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States."

What is sufficient? What is can or cannot, might be or might not? It is a matter of judgment. The article continues that in those areas the Community shall take action in accordance with subsidiarity only if the objectives cannot be sufficiently achieved and can therefore,

"by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved by the Community."

All those are matters of subjective judgment. One can go on for hours on this sort of mobile pattern. It is rather like those toys that we had years ago that hang from the ceiling. A balance of judgment is involved and we could argue for years. In the end, it will be for the European Court to decide whether subsidiarity applies.

I close on the matter of citizenship. All of us here are proud of being citizens of the United Kingdom. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery has returned for these closing remarks. He will agree that we are also citizens of the world. We can be good citizens of the world community only if we are good citizens of our local and national community——

Mr. Alex Carlile: And the international community.

Mr. Spearing: —and the international community. The hon. and learned Gentleman struck the right tone in his remarks. There is such a thing as wholesome nationalism, which might be called community spirit, and there is unwholesome nationalism, of which he spoke and of which we have various experiences. Unless we can entrench some form of democracy in our national citizenship, we are likely to engender the forces of nasty nationalism that both he and I abhor and which we are all seeing in parts of Europe today. The only alternative is a form of centralised democracy that destroys the nation as we know it and, with it, the citizenship of the United Kingdom, the power of this House and the power of our people to govern themselves.

11.56 am

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): This has been a fascinating debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) opened the debate with a remarkable speech which was a tour de force and gave us a good profile of the history of referendums, what they meant and when they might be applicable. I hope that he will accept my apologies if, because of constituency business, I am not here for the final stages of the debate.

There are two questions before the House this morning. First, is it desirable that a referendum should be a more regular part of the British way of running our political affairs? Secondly, would the treaties that arose from Maastricht be suitable subjects for a referendum if that were to be a practical means of carrying on our affairs?

I must voice doubts about whether referendums are a suitable part of British political life. I have always been reluctant to accede to the arguments for referendums because they undermine the principle of democracy that we have adopted at Westminster, of which we are justifiably proud. Despite the excellent historical insights of my hon. Friend, the whole purpose of a referendum so far has been largely to get a Government out of a problem rather than necessarily for some overreaching constitutional motivation. That was certainly the case in the 1970s when there was a referendum on our membership of the European Community.

The problem with a referendum is that often it is only practicable if the question can be reduced to its simplest form. That is not because the electorate cannot understand. Of course the electorate can understand many things about our political system and the policies put before it. That is why we usually get a sensible result at general elections and the Conservative party usually wins. Unless the question can be made simple, a referendum is not the right way to proceed.

Mr. Cash: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Taylor: No, I should like to get into my speech. Our Westminster system of democracy allows issues that are often complex affairs such as this to be debated in the Chamber and various aspects to be pulled together. It is then for the Government of the day to carry through the decision, whatever that decision may be. The supremacy of Westminster is an important facet of the way that we run our affairs. It is an important reason for the stability of this country where we are not subjected to wild upheavals. Issues that can be reduced to a simple question are not the way to conduct our affairs. I prefer to have the complex debates that we can have, even though there are such things as Whips, although they are not supposed to be mentioned in polite company. There are other ways, however, of conducting our discussions in the House and of informing ourselves. Those who are interested in a particular subject are more than capable of informing themselves about Maastricht. As I look around the Chamber, I see many hon. Members who have participated in the European debates that we have held in recent years.

Mr. Cash: Will my hon. Friend note that under the protocol on the transition to the third stage of economic and monetary union the fact is that, irrespective of the other protocol that enables us to opt out of it for the time being, we should be precluded from exercising any veto over our entry, as a Community, into economic and monetary union in the third stage? Does not my hon. Friend therefore perceive that what he is saying is absolutely at the heart of the question whether the British people will have the freedom of choice to determine their economic and social priorities because of the nature of the institution of the central bank? Does he not think that that could easily be reduced through, say, Mr. Speaker's Conference or an independent commission to a question that would be evenly balanced and would put the British people in the position of being able to make a free choice about a free democracy?

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend is a great expert on constitutional matters and I bow to his wisdom, but he will know that the principle negotiated at Maastricht by the British Government is that this House of Commons will make the decision prior to the transition. I have read all the yellow pages, just as my hon. Friend has. He knows that the House will have that right. It is a very important point. What the Government have done is, in effect, to enshrine what I am saying: that Westminster should make the decision. That is the basis of my argument for being reluctant to agree to a referendum as a way of conducting our affairs.

Mr. Gill *rose*——

Mr. Favell *rose*——

Mr. Taylor: I believe in the supremacy of Westminster and that that principle should be enshrined. I see that my hon. Friends the Members for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) and for Stockport (Mr. Favell) are trying to intervene. I know that Madam Deputy Speaker is anxious that I should not give way on too many occasions, but I shall give way to one of my hon. Friends.

Mr. Gill: My intervention will be brief. Does my hon. Friend not recognise that the essential point in the case that has been put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) is that, in the unique circumstances where a majority of Opposition Members take the view that is shared by the majority of my hon. Friends, when it comes to a general election the electorate will not be given the right to make a choice about these important and fundamental constitutional issues? The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills is that only by having a referendum will they be given that choice and that it would be wrong to deny them that choice.

Mr. Taylor: I regard that argument as slightly dangerous. The reality is that, when one votes in a general election, one votes for the party that one believes can best look after a whole series of complex issues on behalf of the nation, not one particular issue. That is another reason why I think that the country as a whole should vote for a Government who can deal with all the issues, including issues as complex as this. When it comes to the general election, regardless of the fact that the parties may appear to agree about the main thrust of the issue, they will approach the issue in very different ways. There are already distinct differences of approach between the two Front Benches. There is a particularly distinct difference when it comes to the views of the Liberals, who start with the principle that they would prefer to have a European federal, centralist state rather than Westminster itself. Many of the Liberals, in debates that I have had with them outside the Chamber, have openly said that.

Mr. Alex Carlile *rose*——

Mr. Taylor: I shall willingly give way to a constitution-monger.

Mr. Carlile: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that when he uses the term central federal state it shows that he does not understand what he is talking about? The whole concept of federalism is that one does not have centralisation. One has government that is devolved to parts of the federation. He has no authority to talk about Liberal or Liberal Democrat policy—I am not sure whether he is being particular or general—unless he understands the concepts.

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman does not know about the debates that I have had with other members of his party. Many Liberals take many different views, depending on the circumstances, on these issues. Of course I understand the difference. If the hon. Gentleman will be patient, he will see that I intend to turn to the federal issue. The word "federal" is a false friend and a false enemy. It means different things to different people.

Mr. Favell: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Taylor: No; I must make progress.

Mr. Favell: My intervention would help my hon. Friend's argument.

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend makes an absolutely wonderful offer, which I must accept.

Mr. Favell: My hon. Friend and I have crossed swords on this subject on many occasions. A moment ago he said that at the general election the people of this country will vote for who is to govern the country and who should form the Government. What concerns people like me, however,

is whether the government of this country is to pass elsewhere. People will not be asked that fundamental question at the election. Why should they not be asked that fundamental question?

Mr. Taylor: I shall cover the point made by my hon. Friend, but first I must make progress with my speech.

Federalism can mean all things to all people. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) said, to the Germans "federal" means decentralisation of power. Therefore, it is a false friend. What we must look at is where the negotiations are taking us in the Community. The European Community was founded in the 1950s on political grounds. We used to refer to it as an economic Community. It was an economic Community because economics was the way to deliver political objectives. They ran side by side, but they were also closely interlinked. The point made by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) is valid today in terms of the relationship between the French and the Germans. It was certainly valid in the 1950s. Times have not changed.

The reason that the French were keen to develop the Community in the 1950s was that they realised that they must not repeat the mistakes that were made after the first world war when the policy towards Germany was almost to force it into some form of isolation and to enforce reparations. The French understood that the way to bring Germany back to a strong position within the landmass of Europe was to make political concessions and to enter joint structures that would enable both nations to grow together, although at the outset that might have appeared to reduce French sovereignty over many decisions that otherwise they would have taken independently. That was the motivation for the Community.

It is interesting to note that that political aspect of the Community, which caused many of the countries that joined the European Free Trade Association to stay outside, has become the greatest catalyst for change in the wider Europe and has meant that the Community has been a successful institution both internally and for change in Europe as a whole. The members of EFTA are now knocking at the door not only of an economic agreement with the Community but of a political arrangement, since that would be implied if they entered full membership.

The strength of the Community is something that we should have accepted all the way through. When we joined the Community in the 1970s we left EFTA to join not an economic bloc but a political organisation where there was a clear framework, provided in the treaty of Rome, that implied certain concessions by Britain as a nation—not least that ultimately there would be supremacy of law through the European Court of Justice. Those decisions were taken in the 1970s.

The act of joining the Community committed us to changing our way of political life to embrace aspects of the constitution of the European Community. That was debated and agreed in the House. Subsequently, and rightly—I played an active part in the campaign—it was confirmed in the referendum. The question was straightforward and was, in effect, "Do you want in or out?"

Sir Teddy Taylor: Rubbish. It was, "Do you want to withdraw?"

Mr. Taylor: The British people clearly decided that they wanted to stay in the Community.

Mr. Spearing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Taylor: No. I will not be distracted from my point. I was involved in the campaign, so I understand. That was the effective question.

Since that time, Britain has been acting in accordance with the treaties of Rome and has embraced their implications. We have often had difficult debates in the House because we have not fully appreciated the implications of what was agreed.

I was not a Member when the Single European Act was passed, but several of its chapter headings were clear. However, we tended to think that they would never happen, partly because they were not subject to qualified voting.

Sir Teddy Taylor: We did not.

Mr. Cash: We did not.

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friends were far sighted, and no doubt they contributed to the debate. The reality is that those headings were included.

Under the Maastricht treaties, we have taken further steps forward within the confines of the treaties of Rome, such as new agreements on voting patterns. That is not a new principle but merely development of an existing principle.

Mr. Spearing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Taylor: I will give way at the end of this section so that the hon. Gentleman can see it in the round.

There is a new factor—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot hear the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) for cross-talk.

Mr. Taylor: I am grateful for your protective intervention, Madam Deputy Speaker.

A new factor has emerged from the treaty of Maastricht. The object of the Community has always been to achieve ever-closer union of the peoples of Europe. Interestingly, under the Maastricht agreement, the ever-closer union of the peoples of Europe can be furthered outside the confines of the rule of law of the European Court of Justice. That is the pillar approach that my right hon. Friend the Minister mentioned this morning, to which I am sure he will return later.

There is, therefore, a new dimension in the treaties of Maastricht, but it is less worrying to those who are concerned about the overall nature of the Community than it would have been if the separate pillars of foreign policy and justice had been brought within the institutions of the Community.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, but perhaps we could have prevented the contretemps if he had done so earlier. May I take him back to what he alleged was the question in the referendum? I agree that that may have been the effective question in some people's minds, but surely he will agree that the actual question was something like this: "Do you agree with remaining a member of the European Economic Community on the terms recently renegotiated by Her Majesty's Government? Yes or no?" Since the Government distributed half the "Yes" literature, it was

[Mr. Spearing]

not surprising that the vote was two to one in favour. The hon. Gentleman may think that that was an endorsement of our entry, but it was nothing of the sort.

Mr. Taylor: I am grateful for that intervention, which underlines my concern about referendums being a good way of doing things. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's help in furthering my argument.

At Maastricht, we further developed something on which we were already clearly set. We have broadened the debate by showing that we can move towards ever-closer union with the peoples of Europe without being solely constrained within the treaty of Rome and the institutions set up under it. But the principle of our co-operation within the European Community, the principle that we are a stronger nation through that co-operation and the principle that the European Community and European union are a strong defence of the interests of ourselves and European partners in a difficult world, were decided when we joined in the 1970s. It is not a question that can be put to the British people at each stage of the fulfilment of that path. The original question was put, and I should like to ensure that, under our presidency later this year, the nature, development and character of the Community are heavily influenced by a Conservative Government so that the things for which I stand are better reflected than they would be if the Labour party were in charge of the country. That is the real debate and question before the House.

12.15 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): The House listened with proper attention to the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), who moved the Second Reading eloquently, passionately and with conviction. Having heard him in similar debates, I know that that is characteristic of him.

As the hon. Gentleman argued with that passion, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) sat two rows behind him. I wondered why she found it impossible to include him in her Government, especially given some of the Ministers whom she included. I pay him the compliment that he would have been much better than many of those whom she preferred, but the right hon. Lady has not stayed long enough to express a view on the Bill, so we shall watch the Division list with considerable interest.

The House should not be charmed or captivated by the arguments that the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills advanced, however passionately he did so. I do not believe that the House should support the Bill and I shall explain why.

The subject had a higher profile when the hon. Member chose it for his private Member's Bill. It had the celebrity backing of the right hon. Member for Finchley, of, rather surprisingly, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn)—a fairly glittering array of supporters, not all of whom are in the House today to support it.

Things have moved on slightly, although the arguments still exist. It was interesting to see the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor), surrounded by his hon. Friends, use the most technical description. I recall the old story of being surrounded by one's enemies and looking across at one's opponents, but differences exist on both sides. The subject divides the country, but not as widely as people suggest, and certainly there are passionate views within the parties. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) does not reflect the entire view of the Liberal Democratic party. Its spokesman on European affairs made it clear that he did not agree with the idea of a referendum on the Maastricht treaty. But the issues are important and this is a valuable debate, especially as most hon. Members who are in the Chamber populate European debates, as I have for many years.

One aspect of this continuing debate that worries me is the view that what is wrong with the European Community, the European Communities Act 1972, the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1986 and what undoubtedly will be European Communities further amendment Act in the new Parliament is that we shall be told what to do by foreigners. In the article that he wrote in *The Guardian* the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills said:

> "The search for consent that is particular to Britain can be gainsaid by a combination of other nations who neither share our language, common law or common public opinion."

It is as if the cultural difference between those on the continent who might outvote us in terms of qualified majority voting and ourselves was the real root of the objection to the pooling of sovereignty to which the hon. Gentleman is so violently opposed. However, I do not associate him with the ideas of others.

The hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) said that he could speak with conviction because he was half German. He said that the Germans never go to a picnic without wanting to run it. Even the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) in the context of other peoples and other nations might have been found objectionable not only to the House or to his party but perhaps to the law itself. I worry that we may be considering the issue in terms of this country versus other nations, as distinct from other people.

The Bill is not about the principle of referendums. The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills made that clear at the beginning. It is a Bill about treaties and relates specifically to the treaty negotiated and signed at Maastricht. We are not holding a generalised debate about the benefits of a referendum on specific subjects—we are talking about the Maastricht treaty and it is to Maastricht that we must look.

The question to be decided is only whether a referendum is the appropriate way to take a decision on the Maastricht treaty or whether that decision is more properly to be taken by Parliament itself. Consequential legislation will be necessary for the treaty and we are told that it can only come and will only come in the new Parliament after the general election. Therefore, the next Parliament will have the decisive say on whether this country will subscribe to the treaty signed on behalf of Her Majesty by the Foreign Secretary and the Financial Secretary to the Treasury two weeks ago in the Dutch town of Maastricht.

Clearly, the treaty is significant. It is far reaching and has wide implications but it is not, contrary to what the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills said, irrevocable and irreversible. No treaty can be or will be.

Mr. Cash: The hon. Gentleman has made a most outrageous statement, which shows that he has not read the protocol on the transition to the third stage. It refers clearly and unequivocally to

"the irreversible character of the Community's movement to the third stage of Economic and Monetary Union."

Furthermore, it states that whether or not we

"fulfil the necessary conditions for the adoption of a single currency",

all member states shall carry out these obligations and no member states

"shall prevent the entering into the third stage."

It continues that that stage will be entered into irrevocably on 1 January 1999. So what on earth is the hon. Gentleman talking about?

Mr. Robertson: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to make the political point about why it was signed, he will no doubt direct that question to the Minister who will inevitably participate in the debate. However, despite the political declaration and the treaty commitment involved, there is no obligation on this or any Government to continue within any treaty if they do not desire to do so. Greenland has already opted out of the European Community as a whole, so there is no irrevocable commitment involved other than in the political context of signing the treaty and giving the political commitment to proceed with whatever has been entered into. Any future Parliament will be in a position to revoke this or any other treaty. Instead of dancing around on the head of a constitutional pin, we must get down to the fine points.

Sir Teddy Taylor *rose*——

Mr. Robertson: I intend to deal with a number of issues. I know that the hon. Gentleman——

Sir Teddy Taylor: Tell the truth about Greenland.

Mr. Robertson: Greenland left the European Community. They decided to do so and were allowed to do so.

So far in this debate we have spoken of the constitutional purity of this country. I worry about being able to represent my constituents, whether it be in Scotland, the United Kingdom or Europe. In the context of the way in which this country is run, it is extremely important that we ensure that we are able to do so, but how are we to ensure within United Kingdom laws that that will have a firm place? How can we wholly regulate the air that we breathe? We no longer live in a country which is finite or which has complete integrity over the air that can waft across the channel. If it proved nothing else, the explosion of Chernobyl showed how vulnerable and interdependent we are on the continent of Europe.

What sovereignty does this country still have over the money markets which in many ways determine the economic environment in which we live? What real power does the Chancellor of the Exchequer have over interest rate policy in a European Community where there are dominant economies? What absolute sovereignty have we over environmental pollution, over the water we drink and over our beaches? What total and absolute sovereignty are we defending over the activities of multinational companies?

Mr. Shore: My hon. Friend is talking the most arrant nonsense. It is simple propaganda. He knows perfectly well that if we were not in the exchange rate mechanism now, we would have a real choice about not only interest rates but exchange rates. The idea that that is not true is quite misleading.

Mr. Robertson: My right hon. Friend is entitled to his opinion. If it is his opinion that we would have absolute control over our interest rate policy if we were outside the ERM, I beg to differ. The United States and Japan have control over their interest rate policies, and if we had an economy as strong as those of the United States and of Japan, we would have more control over ours than we do. It is a fantasy that there is an economic sovereignty out there that we can simply leap to if we leave the ERM or the embrace of the European Community. We cannot go in that direction. One of the signal features about those who preach against development of the European Community and further integration with Europe is that they do not provide a sensible alternative for Britain outside the way in which we are going.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman, but I find it hard to reconcile what he is saying about the powers of the Front Bench with what the leader of his party is telling us about the Prime Minister and his responsibility for the recession that we are in. The two do not square up.

Mr. Robertson: Of course they square up, because although we live in an interdependent European economy, individual Governments can take measures to relieve the plight of their population. The recession in this country is not nearly as bad as it is in the other countries of the European Community and a major responsibility for that lies in the hands of those in this Government who have controlled our economic policy for the past 13 years. They cannot get away with excusing the iniquities from which our people suffer on the ground that it is all due to world economic conditions.

There is no constitutional blockage to the holding of referendums, and I am not suggesting that there should be. We have had four referendums so far, and I played a part in two of them. I did not play a part in the one in Northern Ireland or the one in Wales, but in 1975 I played a part in the referendum on the European Community in which the result was a 2:1 majority in favour of continued membership. However, this debate, like the many other debates in the intervening period, shows that the referendum did not end the arguments.

In 1979, there was a referendum on the Scotland Bill, which resulted in a majority in favour of change. Because of the rules that were imposed and because of the withdrawal of support by the Scottish National party, the will of the Scottish people was never put into effect, and the argument has not stopped. The debate goes on—the referendum did not resolve the issue.

When we approach the question that would be the basis of the referendum advocated by the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills serious practical issues have to be addressed. What question will be put? The hon. Gentleman might have some idea, but it is not answered simply.

Mr. Favell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: No, I will not give way at the moment.

Are the electorate to be given a whole copy of the treaty —the yellow document that has been waved about so much today—because if so, the purple document would

[Mr. Robertson]

have to go along as well. People would need to make up their minds on all the available information if they are to be asked only about the treaty. Will the question be about the principle of economic and monetary union? Although the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills is more concerned about constitutional issues and the political union aspect of the treaty, others have their own interests such as the single currency and monetary union. Will the question be about the timetable to monetary union or about the United Kingdom's right to opt out?

Will the question be about the increased powers for the European Parliament, although those powers will at least give back to the representatives of the people the accountability for decisions that the European Single Act took from them and handed to the Council of Ministers? Will the question relate to the increase in qualified majority voting?

Mr. Richard Shepherd: The hon. Gentleman said that he had taken part in two referendums, including the one in which both he and I took part—that on continued membership of the Community, or the Common Market as it was then called, on the basis of the renegotiated terms. There is nothing complex about referendums. We could ask the simple question, "Do you wish to accept the Maastricht treaty?" It is the duty of the campaign to inform, to advise and to set out the argument, just as it is in every general election campaign. We shall be putting in front of the electorate complex arguments on the ERM, monetary policy and a whole range of policies. Through that educative process, listening to what the Leader of the Opposition and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will say, the people will make a judgment. These are highly complex issues, but the questions can be simple.

Mr. Robertson: I do not disagree with the ballot box, and the sooner that we get to it, the better it will be for the country. This Government have been running away from the ballot box for well over a year. The opportunity and the demand have been there, but the Government have had no desire to go anywhere near the ballot box. I have nothing to fear from the ballot box or from the complicated issues. I will simply put the issues and explain the complexities of the questions that might be put and then return to what I believe to be the sensible way in which to deal with questions of such seriousness and complexity.

Majority voting was not introduced by the Maastricht treaty—indeed, the increase in qualified majority voting in the Maastricht treaty was tiny in comparison to the extension of qualified majority voting that came with the Single European Act. The right hon. Member for Finchley, who graced us with a brief appearance earlier, was responsible not just for the signing of the Single European Act but for ramming the legislation through the House on a guillotine without allowing us a major debate on the points that we wanted to discuss.

Is what the Maastricht treaty says on common foreign and security policy different from the general principle that we conceded when we signed the North Atlantic treaty in 1949? How will immigration and asylum policies be developed in a continent facing all the pressures of increased immigration that may result from the economic instability in eastern Europe? Should there be a question about the social chapter opt-out that the Government have signed, which has led to our isolation on a whole series of issues? Those are some of the complications that might be involved in the questions. Those are the difficulties which would be faced by anyone seeking to draft a question to put before the British people.

The real question is whether there should be one omnibus question in one referendum or whether it should be the role of Members of Parliament to weigh up all the issues involved, to judge their effect and then to be judged, as all hon. Members are, at a subsequent election. Those who demand a referendum—and those who associate themselves with that demand through their hostility to the European Community as a whole, which is not necessarily the view of the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills—on the one hand attack Europe because it has taken power, or will seek to take power, away from the Westminster Parliament while, on the other, they happily argue for Westminster to be robbed of its crucial function of weighing up the issues on behalf of the people. That is one of our weightiest roles. Sometimes we are blinded by the visibility of the accountability of the House, believing that it is the only form of accountability that matters. Because we are part of it, and because television now takes our image into households, we may think that this is all that accountability means. We must look deep down to where the decisions are being taken and where accountability properly lies.

Surely the time has come to stop this endless and uniquely British debate on the theology of being in or getting out of Europe, or being half-in or half-out of Europe—whether we will accept this proposal or that proposal in the legislation. The real issue before the people of this country is what we must do to make the European Community work for Britain and the whole of Europe in a tough and merciless world. Only Britain spends so much of its time pulling up the plant endlessly to examine the roots. Others in the Community are going ahead, working out how to get the best deal and, often, how to get the rules adopted to suit themselves. We inevitably come in belatedly and have to accept the rules on which others have decided.

The Maastricht treaty will be a step forward to a more integrated, perhaps closer and in some ways more sensible Europe. It is not perfect. We have made known our objections to what the Prime Minister negotiated at Maastricht. It is not a final step in European integration —it cannot even be described as a decisive step. The opt-out clauses that the Government negotiated will limit Britain's opportunities to influence the European Community to our benefit. The Labour party will take Europe seriously. In only six or seven weeks' time, we will join the mainstream of Europe and set about ensuring that Europe is developed in a way that will suit all the British people.

12.39 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): I have a difficult task to perform because, on the one hand I want to address the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) and, on the other hand, I am conscious of the fact that many of my hon. Friends have been present in the Chamber throughout the

debate and I do not wish to detain the House at great length. As hon. Members will be aware, sometimes one is urged to do that from other quarters.

I hope that it will meet with the approval of hon. Members on both sides of the House if I first address the general question of referendums and the constitutional questions that they raise. The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) was not quite accurate when he said that this debate is entirely about the Maastricht treaty. Of course, that underlies what my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills is seeking to do. However, the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who shares the scepticism and reserve of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills, focused his remarks on the problems of referendums and their constitutional issues.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills and I became hon. Members at the same time. It is not unfair to say that we have pursued different career paths over the past 10 or 15 years. However, in all honesty, I must say that I am not absolutely confident that, when our grandchildren consider our particular contributions in this place, my contribution will necessarily be more memorable than my hon. Friend's. He has a reputation in the House for being a courageous and passionate libertarian. Even though in my former guise as a quasi-parliamentary policeman he and I had a number of encounters, I gave him nothing but respect in those exchanges. The respect for the passionate way in which he introduced the debate and for the quality of his arguments is shared by Members on both sides of the House.

I am bound to say that today's debate will not be as lengthy or detailed as the debate that took place on 11 March 1975 on whether to hold a referendum on continued membership of the Community. Today's debate has provided an opportunity for the House to canter round the course a bit, but this debate will not be as lengthy or as detailed as that debate in 1975. As my hon. Friends will recall, the Conservative Opposition in those days did not support the case for a referendum then and the Conservative Government today do not support this Bill.

In reducing my remarks considerably, I should refer to the constitutional history of our country and I could quote Dicey and others at length. We have heard a great deal about the will and consent of the people and that matter concerns all hon. Members. Our vital connection to our constituents is important. Although hon. Members may not be surprised by what I am about to say, the people referred to by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) may be surprised. The hon. and learned Gentleman seems to believe that scrutiny is better and the democratic deficit is closed under proportional representation.

There are arguments in favour of proportional representation, but that is not one of them. Many of our partners in the Community who have very sophisticated forms of proportional representation have not discussed such issues with the depth and passion that we have discussed them today. Indeed, in some of those countries, they have barely have been discussed at all. It may surprise people in those countries—although it will not surprise hon. Members—to learn that even while I was accompanying my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in Maastricht, I had to deal with an urgent constituency case on the Monday by telephone. As I have said, it will come as no surprise to any hon. Member that, as we return in aircraft, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary profits from our return to deal with his constituency correspondence.

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): I may be doing my right hon. Friend a great injustice, but am I right in saying that, in the past, he has been in favour of proportional representation? Do his remarks suggest that he has changed his mind?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I have never supported proportional representation, and I rather resent the supporters of proportional representation describing it as a fairer system. It is not a fairer system; it is a different system. It has the disadvantage of facilitating entry into Parliament by smaller parties. The national hurdle that is provided by the first-past-the-post system is rather good. It is one of the reasons why extremist parties—communists, fascists and others—have always failed to achieve representation in the House. I do not put that as total rebuttal, but I do not think that the arguments are balanced. I have always favoured the first-past-the-post system, not least because of the link which is important to all of us—that umbilical cord that links us to our constituents and, through them, to the sovereignty that we collectively exercise on behalf of our constituents.

Rather than parading masses of quotations from Burke, Wilkes and others, I shall focus on the referendum that took place in 1975, to which the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) referred as a great battle. I call it a great defeat. It was a defeat for the House and for the Government of the day. It is worth remembering that we had that referendum because the Government of the day were split from top to bottom on the issue and were incapable of taking a decision on it. Of course my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills is not proposing anything innovative. Every Parliament and every Government may, if the circumstances suit it in the background of general public opinion, call a referendum. It was interesting that, when my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) claimed on behalf of that side of the campaign which he and, indeed, I supported at the time that we had won, four or five of my hon. Friends and four or five Opposition Members immediately rose. I shall analyse that referendum and some of the questions, problems and difficulties that arise from it.

One matter is how to make sure that the electorate is fully informed when asked to judge, in the simple yes-no, in-out way, a complex nexus of issues. That matter has also been touched upon. Hon. Members may recall that, in 1975, there were three leaflets—a "yes" leaflet, a "no" leaflet, and a Government leaflet. They were distributed by post in the last 10 days of May. A Harris poll asked voters which leaflets they had seen, which they had read from cover to cover, and which they had found of help to them in making their decision. Eighty two per cent. of voters had seen the "yes" leaflet, 73 per cent. had seen the "no" leaflet, and 71 per cent. had seen the Government leaflet. About a quarter of voters had read each leaflet from cover to cover, but only 10 per cent. of voters found that the "yes" leaflet had helped their understanding of the issue, falling to only 8 per cent. for the "no" leaflet, and a measly 6 per cent. for the Government leaflet. That shows an

[Mr. Garel-Jones]

understandable reaction. People generally show little concern for the fine print of complex and, frankly, rather dry legislation. They place their trust in their elected representatives, whose job it is to ensure that the small print is not detrimental to the interests of constituents. That is the basis of parliamentary democracy.

During the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills raised an important matter about the subsidiarity test. My hon. Friends may have seen that I went across the Chamber to discuss the matter with him. It would take too long to give him an adequate reply to that important point. It would probably take about 10 or 15 minutes to address why the placing of the last sentence of article 3b as a separate paragraph rather than an integral part of the second paragraph was a matter which exercised our lawyers and lawyers in the Federal Republic with whom we were working on the matter for a considerable number of months. It is an important issue, but it is a narrow matter in the treaty and if I had addressed it I would have left many of my hon. Friends unanswered. That is one illustration of the complexity——

Mr. Richard Shepherd: But that is what happens in a general election.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Of course it is. That is why all general elections contain within them an element of doctor's mandate. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Newham, South or another hon. Member referred to the election in 1931. British people are very sophisticated. They know perfectly well when they vote in a general election that there are some firm policies about which they can be clear, but that there is also an element of doctor's mandate.

Mr. Shepherd: There was a specific example. When Baldwin won the election with a majority in 1931, he said that he must go to the country on tariff reform. He went specifically on that issue and lost. But it was a specific mandate. He responded to the principle in our constitutional practice of the time that one should seek a specific mandate on major constitutional or big issues. I tried to give the examples of the mandates achieved in 1832, 1910 and the early 1930s.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I was referring not to Baldwin's mandate but to Ramsay MacDonald's efforts to achieve a doctor's mandate or doctor's prescription, as it was called. In a sense, the point both reinforces my argument that such matters can be resolved in a general election and makes the point that the issues are complicated and it is difficult to reduce to a simple yes-no answer the complexity of issues not only in the Maastricht treaty but connected with our very membership of the Community.

Of course, I agree with my hon. Friend that the British electorate are extremely sophisticated and able to make their own judgments. I do not suggest for one moment that one can argue against referendums on the basis that the British people are incapable of understanding the issues and making up their minds. I simply argue that the issues are complex and that the evidence that I gave from 1975 of the way in which the leaflets were read and the opinion of their helpfulness among the public makes one pause to consider.

We should also consider whether the 1975 referendum managed, as my hon. Friend would seek to do, to isolate the issue of EC membership from other issues in the mind of the electorate. Michael Steed writing in *The Economist* on 14 June 1975 set out to analyse voting patterns across the country. The yes vote varied from 70 per cent. or more in the south to 30 per cent. in the Western Isles. His conclusion was that within a small margin of error people tended to vote along party lines and broadly reflected the yes-no split within each political party.

So what was gained from the 1975 referendum? It has been plausibly argued by some that the referendum was detrimental to the country. Parliamentary life ground to a halt. Politicians took to the campaign trail and the Government were distracted from tackling the real issues. The Labour Government of the day were beset by the most appalling problems of economic mismanagement and so forth and were distracted from them, which caused commentators to feel—as the press commented—that the referendum had been a luxury that the Government and the country could ill afford. Interest in the referendum soon waned.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South) *rose*——

Mr. Cash *rose*——

Mr. Garel-Jones: I must finish this point and then I shall give way. I expect that my hon. Friends are seeking to take part in the debate. I am trying to reduce my remarks to ensure that other hon. Members may have the opportunity to speak, but I shall certainly give way if I may first develop the argument.

Interest in the referendum soon waned and it was reduced almost to the status of a sideshow. Even the press showed little enthusiasm. I took the trouble to have that fact investigated. In the four weeks before polling day only 17·5 per cent. of lead stories in national daily newspapers referred to the referendum. Other issues took precedence —a railway strike, a strike at ITV, the sterling crisis, record inflation under a Labour Government and even the Bay City Rollers. On polling day that admirable organ of opinion the *Daily Mail* chose to lead with the news of new export orders to Saudi Arabia.

We have had one referendum and it merits analysis. The phrasing of the question caused a lot of trouble in 1975 and it was again apparent today that phrasing the question remains a matter of controversy. Even on such an apparently simple issue as in or out of the Community, could the wording of the question sufficiently affect the answer? Opinion polls were held prior to the referendum to try to find out whether that was so. At the beginning of February 1975, NOP asked a series of differently worded questions and recorded the majority of yes voters over those who would vote no for each question. For example, to the question,

"Do you accept the Government's recommendation that the United Kingdom should come out of the Common Market?"

the yes vote had a majority of 0·2 per cent. For the simple question,

"Should the United Kingdom come out of the Common Market?"

the figure rose to 4·6 per cent. and for the straight choice "In/Out" the figure was 10·8 per cent. Another set of questions were asked. To the question,

"Should the United Kingdom stay in the Common Market?"

the yes vote had a majority of 13·2 per cent.; to the question,

"Do you accept the Government's recommendations that the United Kingdom should stay in the Common Market?"

the yes vote had a majority of 18·2 per cent.; to the question,

"The Government recommends the acceptance of the renegotiated terms of British membership of the Common Market. Should the United Kingdom stay in the Common Market?"

it was 11·2 per cent., and finally,

"Her Majesty's Government believe that the nation's best interests would be served by accepting the favourably renegotiated terms of our continued membership of the Common Market. Should the United Kingdom stay in the Common Market?"

had a 16·2 per cent. majority for the yes option over the no option.

The hon. Member for Newham, South—I do not think that anyone in the House would accuse him of being a Euro-federalist or a Euro-freak—sought to draw our attention to those inherent problems associated with referendums.

Mr. Gill: My right hon. Friend offers a good intellectual argument in favour of the Government's position. Does he not accept that the constituency that he should be tackling consists of all those millions of electors outside this place who will be asking themselves, "Why are the Government and our national politicians refusing to give us, the people, an opportunity to express our views on what we regard to be the most important constitutional issue of our lifetime?"

Mr. Garel-Jones: My hon. Friend places me in something of a dilemma. I do not regard myself as, and I do not think that anyone who spends any time working actively in the Community could be, what we would define as a Euro-enthusiast. Nevertheless, I broadly wish to make it work and think that it is in the interests of our country. I am tempted by my hon. Friend's proposition, because I have no doubt that, were a referendum to be held, an overwhelming majority of the British people, in the exercise of their common sense, would vote for the treaty.

Mr. Michael Carttiss (Great Yarmouth): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I shall give way in a moment.

My concern is much wider. Looking back on history, I shall refrain from examining the referendum on devolution in Scotland. Confident though I am that the result would reinforce my views, every time we have such a referendum it is, in a sense, an abdication of responsibility by the House and the Government of the day. This Government intend to make no such abdication of their responsibilities; nor do they intend to invite the House to abdicate from its responsibility.

Mr. Cash: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I hope that my hon. Friend will understand if I do not give way because others, including my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), want to participate in the debate. I do not wish to refuse to give way, but I want to conclude my remarks so that other hon. Members can take part in the debate.

The Bill is admirably brief, but I fear that, for this purpose, it may be too brief. It claims that its purpose is simply to

"Require a national referendum as a precondition of the ratification of certain treaties."

Those treaties are narrowly defined as those relating to the establishment of the European Communities, which would further

"diminish the Authority of the Queen in Parliament to regulate the affairs of the United Kingdom".

As the hon. Member for Hamilton said, every time the United Kingdom enters a treaty, our sovereignty and the rights of this House are diminished to some extent. If the Bill proceeds to its Committee stage, some hon. Members may seek to broaden its scope to include, for example, the important constitutional matters mentioned by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): One of the matters to be considered in Committee, if there is to be a full and proper referendum, would be the state of the electoral register on which that referendum would take place. At present, 3 per cent. or more of the electorate is missing from the electoral register. Much has been said about the importance of constituents and how they should be responded to in referendums and parliamentary democracy. Therefore, is not there a need to do something about ensuring that the register is correct? Should not we ensure that it is correct before the next general election?

Mr. Garel-Jones: In order not to detain the House, I suggest that, should the Bill receive a Second Reading, the hon. Gentleman should ask to go on the Committee and make his point there.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Garel-Jones: Does my hon. Friend seek to take part in the debate later?

Mr. Marshall: No.

Mr. Garel-Jones: In that case, I shall conclude my remarks because some hon. Members have been in the House for the whole morning and I hope that the House will forgive me if I do not give way again.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) said, let us assume that the criterion is fulfilled and a referendum is called. Would there be a campaign to inform people of the true implications of the treaty? I am sure that my hon. Friends and those who take a different view would try to do that. How would the campaign be organised? How could a question be formulated to isolate the issue of the treaty's ratification from the other issues of the day? Asquith said that a

"referendum might be nominally and ostensibly on some particular point"

but that

"You would have the turmoil, the tumult and a large part of the expense of a general election; and I do not believe it would be possible . . . under these conditions, completely to segregate the particular issue on which the referendum took place, and entirely to ignore the whole of the rest of the field of politics."

Careful analysis of the previous referendum shows that despite the reneging on the responsibilities of this House, and despite the suspending of the Government for three or four weeks, the way that people voted in the end appeared to reflect not just the party splits, but the yes-no split within those parties. The referendum proposal is not only unhelpful, but it flies in the face of our responsibilities as Members of Parliament.

[Mr. Garel-Jones]

The Maastricht treaty has been the underlying theme of the debate. A number of hon. Members have expressed concern about the diminution of the sovereignty both of this House and of the British people. My belief is that on many of the great issues, the countries of Europe should try to speak with a single voice. I want those countries to work together more closely on things that we can do better together. Europe is stronger when we do that, whether it be on trade, defence or in our relations with the rest of the world.

Working more closely together does not necessarily require power to be centralised in Brussels or decisions to be taken by appointed bureaucracies. As the years go by and as the Community develops, we must make a judgment on how the balance between the will of the Government and the House, working with others in Europe, is best served. The words that I used were more or less a paraphrase of those used by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) in her important speech in Bruges. I agree with every word.

What we have contrived to do in Europe is to begin, perhaps for the first time in the past 20 or 25 years, to put the brakes on that "inevitable" move, which some of our European partners still wish to happen, towards a single structure, where every area of political endeavour would be contained within the treaty of Rome and would therefore depend on a Commission initiative and probably on a qualified majority vote, and would then be justiciable under the European Court of Justice.

My hon. Friends are right to say that that is the way that many of our partners want the Community to move, and they have done so for many years. The great success of Maastricht is that at last we have begun to shape a wider European union, which will enable us, on a number of crucial issues that go to the heart of what being a nation means—foreign, defence, interior and justice policies—to begin to win the argument that agreements between 12 nation states, taken freely and through co-operating together, are not, by definition, qualitatively worse than agreements taken inside the treaty.

Of course, there are many areas such as trade and agriculture where we have agreed that the Commission has competence. We must do as my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East has done almost throughout his political lifetime, which is to fight to bring about rational improvements in the common agricultural policy.

The Bill, which was introduced in such a distinguished way by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills, is mistaken, not only because it invites the House to abdicate its responsibilities, but because the sort of question that would be put—as was evident in the previous referendum—in all likelihood would reflect the differing views within the House. The treaty that we have, and to which the House will return in the next Parliament when a Bill will be laid before it to amend the European Communities Act, will require the approval of the House as a necessary pre-condition of ratification by the Government. I have no doubt that that Bill will receive careful scrutiny and will be the subject of passionate debate by my hon. Friends.

I am sure, as I have been since I came into the House, that the House will express the will of the British people in the matter. That will be expressed by freely elected Members of the House in the way that British democracy has traditionally settled these matters, whether they be large or small.

1.10 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): There is a certain irony in the fact that we are debating in an interesting, informative and illuminating way the question of a referendum on the Common Market on a Friday when the Chairman of the Select Committee on Sittings of the House has held a press conference on its report which proposes doing away with 10 Friday sittings. Today's exchange of opinion demonstrates the value of Friday sittings and the importance of being here to exchange ideas. I shall be as brief as I can, because I know that other hon. Members want to speak.

There is and has been a continuing, sustained drive towards a western European state: there is no question about that. We have seen an erosion of the ability of an elected United Kingdom Government to make decisions in a number of areas. The Maastricht summit advanced that position still further. I shall come to details in a moment.

Let me remind the House of the cost of our membership of the Common Market. Over the past 10 years it has cost us £14,000 million. That is our net contribution after all the receipts from the Common Market have been paid back. It is after taking into account all those notices saying, "Europe helps Bradford", or Tadcaster, or Tamworth, or wherever it is. All those grants from the Common Market are simply some of our own money coming back. For the past 10 years, after all those grants have been taken into account, we have paid £14 billion. The payment this year will be of the order of £3 billion. New demands are being made for a massive increase in the United Kingdom contribution, which I hope this Government and the next Labour Government will resist.

I support the idea of nations working together as a group of equal nation states without one nation being subordinate to another. I fear that we are becoming subordinate because of the minority position that we so often occupy. Decisions, against which we have voted, are taken by the Council of Ministers, but, as they are majority decisions, the Commission implements them and we can do nothing about it.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting speech. Is he aware that, ever since the Single European Act, Britain has been outvoted, I think I am right in saying, on only four occasions, two of which were on the same issue? The Federal Republic, to which the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) referred, has been outvoted more often than that on a single day.

Mr. Cryer: I am about to give examples of voting of a relative minor but important character to demonstrate what has been going on.

The treaty of Rome was bad enough. It limited our freedom of movement, as every treaty does: there is no question about that. No other treaty provides for legislation affecting the United Kingdom. Regulations have direct application and directives are required to be applied through subordinate legislation in this country. No other treaty inhibits and curtails the elected Government of the day as does the treaty of Rome. That was extended by the Single European Act.

The Single European Act was a bitter disappointment to its Italian author, Altiero Spinelli, who had a driving ambition to see a united states of western Europe. His disappointment was my pleasure because I was keen that his ambition should not be realised. However, it was a step on the way. Maastricht represents another step. If Altiero Spinelli were alive today, I am sure that he would welcome it with open arms.

There was widespread resentment and disappointment in the European Parliament about the Single European Act because there is a drive towards the federalism of a united states of western Europe. It is a very important issue which should be put to the people. Every time there are Home Office questions there are answers to questions about the integration of 1992, the year that we are in now. It would not be a bad year in which to have a referendum on the whole issue: the question of drugs, terrorism, the movement of illegal armaments and animal diseases. Only this week we received a letter and a brochure from an organisation that is concerned about the possible removal of barriers to the free movement of animals and the increase of rabies.

In the context of the sunshine vision that the pro-marketeers so often maintain, this may all seem to be relatively trivial, but these matters make up the day-to-day way in which we live and they are important. We ought, therefore, to take them into account and to be prepared to invoke these arguments in the referendum provided for by the Bill. The Bill is imperfect. I intend to turn to its imperfections later.

All these matters are of great concern to our people. Let me give an illustration of the way in which the Government's ability, within the great scheme of things within the Common Market, is limited. A number of orders are going through the House. The House knows that I am the Chairman of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. Therefore, we look at all the 1,500 to 2,000 statutory instruments that proceed through the House, having been produced by the Government each year. A significant proportion of those statutory instruments are based on EEC directives. Within the great vision that is put forward, what are the two most recent statutory instruments? One is for the harmonisation of lawnmower noise.

The Minister said that we want to work closely together. Yes, we do, but do we want to be compelled to work together in such a way that we are bound by law to operate all our lawnmowers at the same level of noise and that it would be an offence to exceed that level? That is the character of the Common Market. It is not a great union of nations. It amounts to a pettifogging application of bureaucratic details spelt out by unaccountable, unelected, overpaid and over-cosseted bureaucrats called Commissioners and all their appointed, unaccountable, overpaid staff in the regions.

If anybody says that the bureaucrats represent only a very small proportion, compared with the number of civil servants who work in the Welsh Office, or the Scottish Office or the Department of the Environment—I have asked questions about that, too—the fact is that thousands of our civil servants in the Department of the Environment and in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are working full time on EEC matters, purely and simply. It is not just the Brussels bureaucracy, therefore, that we are concerned about; we are concerned about the whole panoply of the extension of the growth in administration, based in Brussels, that is penetrating this country.

At the beginning of this year, to give another example, most motorists—there are many of them, about 20 million—were faced with a new imposition: a £1,000 fine if the tread on their car tyes was not more than 1·6 mm. Until 1 January of this year, it had been 1 mm. It is a relatively minor matter, but the Department of Transport told the Common Market that 1 mm was safe enough and that fewer than 1 per cent. of all accidents occurred in wet weather when an extra 0·6 mm might, without any evidence, meet the road-holding characteristics of all cars. The Common Market did not provide any evidence, and the Department said, "There is no evidence of improved safety." The Government voted against the proposal in the Council of Ministers but were outvoted, so on 1 January the Common Market imposed criminal penalties for breaching the 1·6 mm tread depth. No doubt that is treated as a trivial matter, but it imposed additional costs on every motorist, to the pleasure and delectation of tyre manufacturers, of between £50 and £1,000.

That is how such legislation is creeping into all aspects of our national and daily life. I say that it is not necessary and that we should halt at this point. I am a convinced opponent of the Common Market, which has been a millstone around our neck.

Some people may say, "We have come so far; let us go no further." How shall we make that decision, because we will not make it in here? The bureaucracy and weight of the administrative machine in Brussels are too strong; it is now part of our administration of government. We must ask the people of the nation, "Do you wish the subordination of the United Kingdom Parliament and Government to Brussels to be halted, or should we allow the drift towards Euro-federalism to continue whereby this place, as we predicted in the 1960s and 1975, will become little more than a county council?" This is the point at which we should do so.

The Minister said that there are difficulties with a referendum. Of course there are, but we shall conduct a difficult process over the next few weeks—the general election. The newspapers will pay attention not only to the general election but to a wide range of issues, some of which will impinge on the general election, just as in a referendum.

In a referendum, people would examine the arguments. People must have the right to receive information, some of which will be prejudiced and some objective, although it is difficult for human beings to be objective in any given circumstance. The Bill does not provide for that, so I assume that the author intends it to be done under delegated powers. The amount of expenditure allocated to each side must be the same to avoid the surfeit of propaganda that was churned out in the 1975 poll. The Government claimed that there would be one leaflet for each side, but they did not say that they would issue another leaflet to ensure that it was two to one.

Mr. Spearing: Three to one.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend is right.

Some of us said that limits should be placed on expenditure. We have such limits in general elections so that the fat cats cannot pour money into a campaign that misleads and subverts the argument and creates

[Mr. Cryer]

impressions that lead to an unfair result. Everybody in the United States believes that a similar system should be imposed much more tightly, because if someone there can get enough money he can dominate television with commercials. We have rejected that in our country because we think that it is unfair. Ours is a decent, proper system. In council and general elections, we have a limit on expenditure.

Mr. Dykes: Not on national expenditure.

Mr. Cryer: We have limits on expenditure.

Mr. John Marshall: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cryer: No, I am not giving way. The hon. Gentleman has only just come in and hon. Members who have been here a lot longer still wish to take part in the debate.

The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) is quite right: we have limitations not on national expenditure but on constituency expenditure, which have the same effect. There is no reason why that principle should not be translated to national expenditure for a referendum. That is an important qualification which was raised when the legislation was passed, but it was ignored by the Government of the day. I think that that was deliberate.

The Bill is justified and it has my support. I do not think that it will get any further, but it is at least a marker which shows that some of us want to ensure that the drift or inertia is stopped. Platitudes pour out about the victory at Maastricht, about protection, about going so far but no further and about signing one section or removing a sentence. I have been in Parliament since 1974 and I have seen that drift occurring.

How many times have we heard that the common agricultural policy will be reformed? How many times has that been said in this House, and how many times has it proved to be untrue? The CAP still soaks up 70 per cent. of the European Community budget. Why cannot we renationalise our agriculture to make it fairer and better and less wasteful and less destructive of our countryside which is the inheritance of us all? We cannot because we are bound by the treaty, but we hear many platitudes about changes being made.

The best changes come from outside. We may not necessarily win the argument, but at least let us have the argument and not allow the drift to continue. If people outside say that they are complacent about the drift and accept it, that would not convince me because I should continue the battle to try to persuade them to change their minds—that is the right of us all—but a decision will have been made which is preferable to the drift. The Bill will make that possible, and it has my support.

1.26 pm

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): I had better declare an interest at the outset in case anyone is under any illusion. I am the parliamentary adviser to the Referendum First Campaign. I am not paid for that—it is a labour of love for my country.

I agree with the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) that the time has come to take stock of our membership of the Community. The Community is like a club and when one joins a club one pays a subscription every year. From time to time, one reconsiders and if one decides that the club is no longer the same club one joined, one decides not to pay a further subscription.

I and many right hon. Friends believe that the Community is changing its character. When I voted to join the European Community, I believed that I was joining a free trade association. I read all three pamphlets handed to me, but I laboured under that illusion. That is why I voted to join.

The European Community is now dedicated to turning itself into a political and economic union—a closer and closer union—and it is time for not only the House but the people to be allowed to take stock and to decide whether that is what we want. I believe that when the history of the 1992 general election comes to be written, unless all three parties are prepared to commit themselves to allowing the British people to decide whether they wish the power of the House to drift away to Europe, the election will be go down as the phoney election. People may not realise now, but they soon will—unfortunately, probably not until after the general election—that whichever Government are in power, that Government will no longer be in total control, or even part control in some cases, of matters as important as who should be allowed to enter our country.

The Government will not be in control—to a large extent—or our economy, of whether the interest rate on mortgages goes up or down or whether the overdraft with the bank manager suddenly goes up or down and whether firms are possibly forced into bankruptcy as a result of a decision taken not here by the Bank of England but in Frankfurt. People's economic fortunes will depend not on what the Opposition—if they form a Government—or we do, but on how German reunification progresses and on whether the Bundesbank believes that it is right to increase interest rates in order to combat the greatest recession since 1929 and the 1930s.

When the electorate realise that they have been robbed of electing a Government who have control over these decisions, their anger will know no bounds, and it should not. The House has made decisions without asking the people and without their realising the implications—some small and some rather bigger. For example, there was the doing away with county councils and moving Yorkshire into Lancashire—I am a Yorkshireman myself. People did not realise until too late that these were great constitutional changes to hundreds of years of our history. They should not have been done without the whole-hearted consent of the people—there is a phrase.

Our country is now a multiracial society—one cannot turn the clock back and nor would I wish to do so. However, people were not asked about the policies that brought about that change, and they should have been asked. The changes brought about by Maastricht will be even bigger. Control over matters as large as that will move from here to elsewhere, and there is no greater decision than that. I agree with what the hon. Member for Bradford, North and others have said.

Mr. Cryer: Bradford, South.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend look back at the Division lists for 25 January 1978 when the House last voted on whether there should be a referendum, in that case for Scotland and Wales? Does he agree that the words of the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) are

somewhat devalued because at that time he voted against the people of Scotland having a referendum? If the people of Scotland could not understand devolution, why does the hon. Gentleman think that the people of England can understand Europe? Is not the hon. Member for Bradford, South a humbug?

Mr. Favell: I will not comment on whether the hon. Member for Bradford, South—I apologise for getting the wrong end of Bradford—is a humbug, but he is entitled to change his mind. I voted yes in the referendum on continued membership of the Common Market and I now believe that that was a fundamental mistake. I believe that many other people believe that that was wrong. I am asking that they should be given the opportunity to express through a referendum whether they wish to go any further.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) spoke of Scottish devolution. My hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) mentioned the article in the *Financial Times* on 12 December 1991, which said:

"The Maastricht Treaty is indeed the biggest milestone in the Community's 34-year history . . . in its preamble, many of the attributes—common citizenship, defence and money—of a potential Euro-super state"

were being put into place. He is right. Some people are beginning to rumble that. They certainly are in Scotland. The Scottish National party is realising that power is moving away from the United Kingdom to Brussels and is talking about "Scotland in Europe". If decisions are not to be made here in Westminster, where Scotland has quite a large representation, why not take a place at the top table in Brussels? It is difficult to argue against that.

The British people as a whole must be asked whether they wish the United Kingdom to break up. The SNP will do better than many people believe, and many Labour Members are beginning to realise that. These great matters should be put to the people, not decided here on a three-line Whip. The United Kingdom was put together by our forebears in 1707 and since that time, we have defeated dictators together, fought wars together, won and lost empires together, traded together, intermarried, and had a single currency. Everybody should be asked to decide on whether to change that, and it should not be decided only here. It certainly should not be decided without being put to the electorate at a general election, as it will not be. That is why the general election of 1992 will be regarded as a phoney election.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State said, there will be more IGCs before 1996—possibly even before the general election. More decisions will be made, and that really will be the cap on it. No doubt the same arguments will be advanced in the House. People will say, "We must not have a referendum. Don't forget the 1992 Maastricht treaty. This House agreed to a treaty of union. Don't you know what a treaty of union is? You knew what the Act of Union in 1707 meant. Surely you know what the treaty of union in 1992 meant."

In our heart of hearts, whether we are for it or against it, we know what the treaty means. It is the drive towards a united states of Europe. It is the drive towards a federal super-state. In the summer, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said:

"A European super-state would not be acceptable to me or to the House—and in my judgment it would not be acceptable to the country."—[*Official Report*, 18 June 1991; Vol. 193, c. 142.]

The country should be asked. The Irish are having a referendum on the treaty of Maastricht. The Danes are having a referendum on the treaty of Maastricht. The British, with the oldest democracy of all, should be given the benefit of a referendum.

1.35 pm

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), who has left the Chamber—temporarily, I assume—referred to one of those irritating Community directives, the lawnmower noise directive, which was being examined by his Committee, the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. It is interesting that he did not reach the conclusion that all good constitutionalists in this Parliament should reach if they are really concerned about this institution's future strength: if a majority vote in the Community left this Parliament seething—across the Benches and across the parties—at the injustice of the decision, Parliament could rise up against the Executive and say, "We will not accept that decision; we will vote against it." It is interesting to observe that, despite all the noise, all the ritual, all the hubris and hyperbole, this Parliament has never objected to a single directive from the European Community once the Executive have revealed their decision on it.

That is contrary to the impression that we like to give. I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) a pride in this institution, and he and I are friends, despite our differences on this fundamental subject. I respect the passion, depth and sincerity with which he spoke, but we know that this is, unfortunately, one of the more docile parliamentary institutions among the member states of the European Community. Much depends on explanations, differences and so on. I should like to see that docility diminish in the future, but it is part of the way in which our traditions have developed. It has a positive side, because most of us probably sometimes relish the fact that a strong Government can introduce instant legislation, sometimes on the most marginal problems, although if we regret that legislation, we can put in a different Bill and possibly even a different Government. That is easier here than in some other countries—particularly the United States—with the separation of powers.

The European Community, too, has that attractive feature—the separation of powers through the multiplicity of sources of power and decision making. The Commission makes proposals. Those proposals must be voted on by the Council of Ministers unanimously or by a majority vote, or by whatever system may be decided. That is safer than our system under which, if an abuse of power takes place, there is no restraint and there are no checks and balances—until there is an upheaval in the party concerned or a significant change at a general election. In our system, self-restraint is needed because of the absence of a written constitution.

As the Minister of State and others have said today, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) is a respected parliamentarian. I wish that he had dealt with such matters in his Bill. The flaw in the Bill is that it refers specifically to European treaties: it is not a general referendum Bill. Although my hon. Friend would deny it—and I am sure that his motives are pure—others

[Mr. Hugh Dykes]

have latched on to the Bill opportunistically to bash Europe yet again and to stir up trouble both before and after the general election.

Mr. Carttiss: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dykes: I would like to, but I want other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend, to have a chance to speak, so I shall be brief. I have been in the Chamber throughout the debate and, apart from raising a point of order, I have not intervened.

It is sad that some Conservative Members and Opposition Members who are worried about these developments are hitting the wrong targets. There should be measures to strengthen our national Parliament. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State made an excellent speech and I appreciated his masterly analysis of the previous 1975 referendum, its parameters, components, questions, answers and percentages. That was a telling critique which exposed the flaws of that referendum. As we are aware, my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was adamant in her opposition to that referendum.

The targets in the Bill are wrong. My greatest objection to the Bill is the mention of any particular reason for the referendum, as if the treaty concerned is different from any other treaty. It is not, although it is more profound. This country took a major decision to share sovereignty with other individual, proud, sovereign countries; to join agreed, integrated structures with no loss of sovereignty, but an overall growth of sovereignty and, therefore, no risks. The British public increasingly support that and, therefore, there is no need for a Referendum Bill.

It is ironic and sad that the Bill undermines the sovereignty of this place and, presumably to a lesser extent, of the upper House, which has a residual role in such matters. Although the Bill has only one sponsor, the Bill's supporters will weaken the residual strength of this institution which has already been weakened by our practices, by the complex nature of the political economy in Britain and the need to work more closely with other countries.

When the United Nations pursued its Gulf initiatives, the other countries in the Security Council and the General Assembly did not impose their will on a hapless Britain. Instead, Britain participated voluntarily and positively. The same thing applies to all our international treaties and agreements.

The treaty about which we are concerned is more profound than others. It provides for legislation in all the national Parliaments, but it is no more terrifying for that. It flows from the original Stuttgart declaration and the Single European Act when there was no question of a referendum. The supporters of today's Bill did not call for a referendum then. There are flaws in putting immensely complex questions to an already overburdened public who, through delegation and representative parliamentary democracy, want their own Members of Parliament to handle such matters. That is our way and our strength.

Countries with written constitutions provide for referendums on major constitutional matters. As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State said, the Bill to be introduced after the general election by whichever party wins—we hope that it will be the Conservatives—will be our legitimate parliamentary equivalent of a referendum. All our citizens will be able to lobby us as hon. Members. There is a close, sacred and precious connection between hon. Members and their constituents, irrespective of party adhesion. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) believes that the public would come to this place and tell us not to support such an outrageous measure, but I doubt that. I believe that there is enthusiasm for such issues not just among the younger generation, but among the older generation as well.

Never before has such a profound treaty been agreed by our Government on behalf of the British Parliament and the public with the enthusiasm that it deserved. If the press and politicians deprived the public of the opportunity of detailed arguments, that was their fault. Basic common sense overrides all that. People know that our planet is smaller and the European part is becoming smaller—not literally, but in the sense of a need for indivisible, close co-operation between countries.

Treaty structures are the sanctification of such Government decisions. Support for Europe is growing. People who visit the Commission in Brussels for the first time come away from it as admirers. I can understand that. They may disapprove of some aspects of the CAP——

Mr. Garel-Jones: Steady on.

Mr. Dykes: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State is rightly trying to restrain me. Perhaps I am going a little too far. I meant to say that they are aware of the way in which a modest-sized bureaucracy creates policy by agreement. The process passes to the Council of Ministers which is asked to vote on the issue. If the European Parliament were to be involved in the process, why did not my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills introduce a Bill that would give the European Parliament additional powers by delegating legislation from this House? That would have been much better.

During world war two, the great coalitions of the parties in a national emergency came together against the fascist tyranny emanating from Germany. In parentheses, I deplore the attacks on Germany that were made, mainly by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) in a quite hysterical outburst. With 85 per cent. of the population of Germany being born after 1945, I can think of no country that has handled its reunification with more impeccable dignity and restraint than the Federal Republic of Germany. We thank it for being one of the model democracies of Europe.

In that emergency in the second world war, there was consensus here. There was no question of a referendum about the major existential decision facing any nation—to go to war or not. There was never a referendum on the NATO treaty—admittedly, that was only on defence and security, but in existential terms as well it was much more far reaching than matters to do with commerce, trade and working together in political economies. There is more and more agreement between the parties, with just a small number of dissidents in each of the major parties. Presumably, the Liberals are mostly pro-Europe, but sometimes there is a little odd exception in the parliamentary Liberal party which bursts through a little chink of light—I was going to say "of sunlight". They sometimes show themselves, but otherwise there is the developing, growing, powerful consensus of the House of

Commons. There is no need for my hon. Friend or others who like the Bill to be nervous of that. What they should do is oppose the Bill.

1.45 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) on a brilliant speech. It was unscripted, and 40 minutes of joy to listen to.

My natural instincts are not to favour a referendum, for some of the reasons that have been given. I fully understand that, to a large extent, the debate about Britain's future place in Europe is about the future place of the House of Commons in Europe. Those of us who wish to resist any further moves to a federal state of Europe do so in large part precisely because we wish to protect the rights and the powers of Parliament.

The sovereignty of Parliament distinguishes our country—I fundamentally disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) on this point—from most others in Europe and provides one reason why the British perspective on Europe is bound to be different. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East said that, in some way, European institutions and the European thread of history are more democratic than ours. That is bizarre. The foundation of the philosophy of Kant and others in 19th century Germany was basically anti-democratic. There is no tradition similar to the British tradition of democracy. One has only to go to the French Assembly or to the Bundestag to realise that those institutions have a totally and profoundly different position in their country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East mentioned the House of Commons being wimpish on questions of Europe, compared with other European institutions. Anybody who attended the French Assembly debate on the Maastricht agreement will have found four or five members there rather drearily trying to find something to say about it and will have understood that European institutions do not have the thread of democracy that we have. Elected German Ministers send their officials to debate great issues in the Bundestag. There is a profound difference in the way that we treat parliamentary democracy.

Mr. Dykes: My hon. Friend has misunderstood me. The reality of the three-line Whip system renders his remarks otiose, because we all know that we are going through a ritual and, in a docile fashion, supporting the recommendations of our Executive. That is strength, but it is also the weakness of the Parliament. I was talking about the post-war period in respect of other Parliaments, not ancient history.

Mr. Spicer: I understand that. I shall refer to the paradox because I intend—it is paradoxical—to speak in favour of the Bill, which has the effect of bypassing Parliament. I shall try to answer the paradox by posing a further dilemma. Perhaps it relates to what my hon. Friend has just said.

Mr. Favell: The Bill does not bypass Parliament. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) suggests that there should be a referendum first. The final decision will be made by Parliament. It need not accept the public's recommendation if it does not wish to.

Mr. Spicer: That is a good point and one to which I intended to return.

For good historical reasons connected mainly with our constitution, in which the executive branch of government and the legislature are fused together, we have a rigid party system in the House of Commons. Perhaps that is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East was making. The next general election will certainly be fought exclusively on party lines. For differing reasons the leaderships of all the parties, perhaps with the exception of the Ulster Unionist party, have decided to form a common front on what to my mind is the crucial point about Europe. In their various ways they have accepted the broad objective of setting up and joining a single European monetary system.

The Government, unlike the Labour party, thankfully, have not included within the commitment to a single monetary system a further commitment to merge the pound in a single European currency. But all parties are committed to the exchange rate mechanism and to the further tightening of its screws. In precisely the same way as they did with the return to the gold standard in 1925, the leaderships of all parties have been willing to trade off rising unemployment against something called a stable currency.

Of course, the Labour party's position is the most dishonourable. I was delighted to see that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) has been rumbled in his own newspaper. I do not know who said that *The Guardian* was an unbiased newspaper but certainly it has rumbled the right hon. and learned Gentleman. In an extraordinary and precise repetition, for example, of Philip Snowden's call for a return to the gold standard from the Opposition Front Bench in 1925, the position of the present Labour party is on the one hand to shout abuse at the Government for high interest rates and rising unemployment and on the other to advocate a tightening of the policies that will have the precise effect of making things worse, in particular a single European currency and the shackling of our industry with social costs.

Part of the debate that has taken place so far has revolved around whether crucial issues about the future of Europe and the link between the currency and political issues can be resolved in a general election. My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) seemed to go to the centre of that when he said that the matter could be resolved in a general election. But in the same breath, or a few breaths later, he said that he did not want such important issues—even he accepted that it was important—to be treated as a specific issue. He wanted them somehow submerged in a wider set of issues. One cannot have it both ways. Either one takes the view that an issue is absolutely crucial or one does not. That is particularly important when dealing with whether we should aim towards monetary union, about which there is a large measure of agreement between the parties.

I wish to focus briefly on the single currency and the relationship with the ERM. It is crucial in a discussion about whether there is sufficient difference between the parties to allow an issue to be decided in a general election. The difference between the value of two currencies should be merely a reflection of the difference between respective unit costs in the two countries to which the currencies are attached. A country with higher unit costs than another but which wishes to hold the value of its currency above

[Mr. Spicer]

the level that reflects them must of necessity raise its interest rates artificially to attract buyers of its currency and suppress demand, especially for imports. The fact that such a policy may raise unit costs by damaging investment is another aspect of this sorry tale. But the real point is that in any case the result is rising unemployment and industrial stagnation, precisely as happened in the years following 1925.

Ultimately, the ERM will be seen to be unworkable and we would then have two options—pull out, or accept a single currency. As that would mean a single monetary and fiscal policy and a single central financial authority, it would also mean the formation of the ingredients of a single state, which answers the question about whether there is a distinction between the political and economic concerns involved. They ultimately come together in that crucial question. The Liberal and Labour parties would rapidly accept a single currency. During this debate they have again accepted the concept of a single currency as the way to resolve the present dilemma.

I hope that the leaders of my party will at least pause to test public opinion on that crucial issue before they take a decision. After giving the matter deep thought, I believe that a referendum on Maastricht would help them in that process. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills is absolutely right to say that the Bill merely proposes a test of public opinion on that crucial issue before Parliament takes its final decision, and that is why I support it.

2 pm

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): I have considerable sympathy with the Bill. Its objectives are clear and based on a worry about the transfer of sovereignty from this country to the European Community. That ought to worry a great many of us. We must find a solution to control it and we have been singularly unsuccessful in doing so in the past. The issues have not been well understood as it has been a gradual process, which is largely outside the ken of most hon. Members, let alone the people outside this place.

My concern about the Bill and the reason why I do not support it is that I do not believe that a referendum is the right way to control that drift. I shall not go over the arguments about referendums again, because I want to keep my remarks brief so that my hon. Friends can speak. However, a referendum would have two major problems. First, the power of the person calling the referendum to determine the nature of the question will clearly largely determine the outcome. Also, it is a question not merely of the words on the ballot paper but of the nature of the argument preceding the vote which determines how people interpret the question on the referendum. Technically, a referendum is not the right solution to the problem.

Another difficulty with a referendum is that we are discussing complicated issues. They cannot be segmented into elements on which a decision of yes or no could be taken. The decisions are interrelated and interactive and will lead to future problems and further decisions. That does not lend itself to a simple yes or no answer, or to a simple discussion and debate. However, it lends itself to proper debate in the House and to the proper use of the role of Members of Parliament.

Edmund Burke has been referred to, but it is clear that the role of Members of Parliament in the House is to listen and to debate the arguments, to understand the issues and to come to a decision which, in their view, is the right decision for the benefit of the country and of their constituents.

Mr. Cash *rose*——

Mr. Carrington: I shall not give way because I am trying to keep my remarks brief.

It is important for such complicated issues to be understood by hon. Members. [SEVERAL HON. MEMBERS: "What about the Opposition Benches?"] Yes it is important that it should be understood by the empty Opposition Benches.

The way in which the House functions in controlling legislation is extremely weak and, in many ways, lax. That is also one of the problems with the nature of Members of Parliament. We have set up a number of Select Committees to examine European legislation—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) is on one such Committee. In general, Select Committees scratch the top of the problems, but even when they examine the problems in depth and come out with recommendations, if the recommendations do not accord with what the Government of the day want to happen, they are entirely ignored and the ability of the House to impose them is also ignored.

The right way forward is not a referendum but to consider increasing the power of Members of Parliament and their resourcing. I suspect that one of the reasons why many issues are not examined is because hon. Members do not have the physical resources to give themselves the time to understand the issues. Although every hon. Member in the Chamber today will have understood the issues, I suspect that few of our colleagues have bothered to read the treaties and understand what is behind them.

The role of Members of Parliament needs to be revised carefully. The role of the support of Government by Members and the separation of the Executive from the legislature must be examined so that Members can be freed to make decisions on those matters without fear of those decisions impacting on their careers or the future of the Government. Essentially, a fundamental change in the role of Members is required. The simplistic solution of holding a referendum is not required.

Another problem with a referendum is that if, as some of my hon. Friends would no doubt like, it results in the Maastricht treaty being accepted, which is quite likely, we would be in an even worse state than we are today. We would have the endorsement of a treaty for reasons that were not clearly understood and the spurious underpinning of progress in Europe. Again, that would need to be understood, but it would not have been understood through the process of a referendum.

I am also concerned that the Bill, its supporters having failed to win the argument in the House, is an attempt to take a second bite at the cherry by requiring a referendum outside. A referendum would solve nothing. Whatever the result, it would be unsatisfactory. The right way to protect the interests of the House is to increase the power of ordinary Members of Parliament.

2.2 pm

Mr. Michael Carttiss (Great Yarmouth): I shall reduce my remarks in recognition of the fact that other hon. Members wish to speak.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) who has temporarily left his seat, in recognising the sincerity with which my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) introduced the Bill, suggested that other hon. Members may have attached themselves to the argument less because of the referendum but in order, once again, to "indulge in Euro-bashing". It is quite unacceptable that hon. Members who have a different vision for Europe from many of us constantly assert that, when we dare to criticise what is happening in the European Community or question some of the policies of our Government in that respect, we are somehow engaging in Euro-bashing and that they are better Europeans than those of us who are sceptical about much of what goes on in the European Community.

No one has to be anti-European to question the developments that have occurred in the European Community in recent years. I, for one, regularly visit Rambouillet, which is twinned with Great Yarmouth. It is one of the original twinning agreements and the mayor of Rambouillet, Senator Gerard Larcher, is vice-president of the Gaullist group, the second largest group in the French senate. The views expressed by people there are not unlike those that I hear expressed by some of my hon. Friends who are concerned about developments in Europe.

The notion that the people in 11 European countries are content to see their sovereignty reduced and live in a supranational state, and that we are the odd ones out, with a handful of people on the right and a handful on the left who do not agree, is nonsense. They may not have the same opportunity to debate as we have, but the fact remains that there are just as many French people—and I know some of them—living in Rambouillet whose views on the subject are the same as mine—that yes, we are part of Europe, and yes, we must remain part of Europe, but that that does not mean, as the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) said, that our lawnmowers all have to make the same noise. The Gaullists and many other French people have no more time than we have for Jacques Delors and all that he stands for.

My right hon. Friend the Minister said that he was confident that, in a referendum, there would be an overwhelming majority in favour of what the Government have been doing. What is the problem, then? Why is it assumed that those who want the referendum are fearful of the result? I do not mind whether those who have sent me and other hon. Members to this place say, "Yes, we want a closer unified union; yes, we want to be more closely involved in Europe; yes, we want our lawnmowers to make the same noise in Great Yarmouth as they make in Maastricht and in Waterloo."

I remember when the town of Rambouillet was presented with a Council of Europe plaque for all that it had done in the interests of European unity, as distinct from a federal Europe. A senior diplomat—a deputy ambassador—from the Belgian embassy attended the ceremony at Rambouillet because that town is also twinned with Waterloo. That was at a time when my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), who I am glad to have sitting at my side today, was making sterling efforts to protect British interests in the European discussions. She was speaking not just for people in this country but for people in Germany, Belgium, France, Holland and all the other countries which no more wanted to be part of a Brussels-dominated surpranational state than I did.

When my right hon. Friend was leading our country in those intergovernmental conferences, that diplomat from the Belgian embassy in Paris asked me, "Why are you British so concerned about all this? Why are you so worried?" It was an occasion on which we were supposed to be diplomatic, so I brushed aside the question by asking her whether she would like another cup of coffee. However, she repeated the question, and said, "But you British just don't seem to want to go along with us. Why is that?" I continued to try to evade her question, but she kept pressing and I said, "Madam, we have had a Parliament in our country since 1295. My borough of Great Yarmouth has been sending representatives there for 700 years. Your country has not existed as a state for more than 160 years. That is why we are worried. We have a tradition of parliamentary democracy that none of the other European countries can claim."

I mean no disrespect to those other countries. As soon as I leave the Chamber, I am flying to Holland. I have many friends there and I agree with what has been said about the Dutch. No one is more concerned than I am to ensure that they are not dominated by Germany or any other country. They are a wonderful people, and their country is only 90 miles from my constituency. They built the port in my town 500 years ago. I like the Dutch, but I do not want them telling me, for example, that my lawnmower is too noisy compared with theirs.

There is much more that I should like to say, but I am conscious that other hon. Members wish to speak. I do not like referendums. Of course, we are sent to this place to make decisions. Someone said that we did not have a referendum when we went to war. Of course we did not. One cannot have a referendum when one is going to war.

We did not have a referendum before signing the NATO treaty. Of course not, but that is wholly different. The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) tried to draw a parallel between our membership of NATO and this business. We are talking now of changing the whole character of this Parliament. NATO did not do that. We entered a defensive alliance. We trusted our Government to negotiate. There is nothing wrong with that. Here, we are changing the very purpose of this institution. For over 700 years Parliament has existed to control, albeit ineffectively sometimes, the Executive, whether the power of the King or, as more lately, of executive government. I am choosing my words carefully, bearing in mind the power that my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley exercised so effectively on our behalf in Europe. Now we are talking about having no control over those decisions.

There is so much that I want to say, but I shall make one final point as I am aware of the time. A constituent of mine who is in horticulture has glasshouses. He is worried about the proposed directive on carbon dioxide emissions and asked me about it. I said that there was no point discussing it with me because I would not have a vote on it. He said that he would talk to the European man about it. Paul Howell, the Member of the European Parliament for Norfolk, will have no vote on it. The matter will be decided by bureaucrats in Brussels, followed by a majority vote in the Council of Ministers.

[Mr. Michael Carttiss]

Those are all tiny, insignificant matters beside the great ideal of European unity and peace in our time, but, my God, they affect our constituents—those whom we have been elected to represent. Why are we afraid to say, "This is your country. Sovereignty is too great to be handed away by 650 people sitting in Parliament"? It would not denigrate the sovereignty of this place, because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills said at the beginning, this place exists only as an expression of the sovereignty of the people. Why be afraid of the people? Let us put our trust in them and have this referendum.

2.12 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): My hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) spoke with great passion and courage. He made me think of my father who sat for that self-same seat some 70 years ago and who would probably have concurred with him. I have to say that I do not. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) who opened the debate with a speech of all the nobility of thought and utterance that we have come to expect of him. I disagree with him, but salute him.

Some 27 years ago I made my first speech in the House on this very subject of Europe. This is almost certainly my last speech here and I have not changed my views in the meantime. The United Kingdom has long-term interests and it is the job of government to protect and advance them. We have a parliamentary system and a party system that enable the Government to do so, often in the teeth of great waves of public opinion urging courses that would be contrary to the country's long-term interests.

In recent years we have had several referendums, each of which may have been justifiable on its merits, but each referendum eats away at the credibility of our parliamentary institutions. That to my mind is a more insidious and profound threat to those parliamentary institutions than the loss of sovereignty to Brussels which, to a large extent, merely reflects the diminished ability of our nation or any other nation to go it alone in the world today. Government by referendum is government by Gallup poll.

Conservative Members are under constant pressure from our consitutuents to have a referendum on capital punishment. I am against capital punishment and I am against holding a referendum on it. I cannot pretend, however, that it would be all that disastrous for our national interests if we had regular referendums on capital punishment. We all know what the result would be. Hanging would be brought back. Some capitalist Home Secretary would come under irresistible pressure to execute some murderer, probably a terrorist, and the terrorist would hang. Then we would discover that we had hanged the wrong chap. There would be great revulsion and another referendum, and capital punishment would be abolished the following year. It would not matter all that much if we had capital punishment in even years and did away with it in odd years, but foreign policy cannot be conducted on that basis.

Thirty years ago a Conservative Government, under Harold Macmillan, decided reluctantly—and it was very reluctantly—that we could not prevent the emergence on our doorstep of a new economic super-power and that we had no choice but to join it. Of course there were positive and much nobler reasons for joining, but, for the purposes of my argument, I shall leave them on one side. We made the choice. For 20 years we have been members of the European Community. It has taken all of those 20 years to settle down into membership of the Community. I do not think that my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills ever really has.

The Labour party has only just grown out of the habit, every time that it is in opposition, of promising to take us out of the European Community, only to turn turtle when they are back in government. Splendid. However, just when we have finished the dangerous game of see-saw, with Britain's membership of the European Community seemingly at risk every time there was the threat of a Labour Government, we find that people on this side of the House, including some who really should know better, are saying that we should submit the country's long-term interests to the unpredictable hazards of a referendum.

The proposal, as I understand it, is to hold a referendum on the Maastricht treaty terms and to close off the option, for the United Kingdom, of moving to a single currency. Just what will happen if the referendum leads to the answer no? The issue might well be voted on in a week in which French farmers set fire to a lorryload of live sheep, or a British girl gets murdered in Italy, or there is a great neo-Nazi demonstration in Potsdam. Such events, joyfully whooped up, as they would be, by our egregious tabloid press—I can visualise already the headline in the *Evening Standard*—could have a substantial, possibly even a decisive influence on the results of that referendum, which is bound to be more of a popularity test than a careful balancing of the issues.

The individual voter in a referendum does not have to find a policy to replace the one that he has rejected. That is our job, our responsibility. We have to live with the consequences of the policy decisions that we vote for and we have to defend them if they turn out to be disastrous. Those who vote for a policy in a referendum can wash their hands of the consequences. There is no way in which they can be held to account. They do not have to say what alternative policies they want. There is no way in which they could, even if they wanted to. If we vote for the Bill, we shall do infinitely more damage to parliamentary democracy then even the most authoritarian president of the European Commission could ever do.

2.17 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): We have been talking about democracy all morning and there is little time left. I hope that no hon. Member will try to prevent our coming to a decision today by talking out the Bill. I have been in this place for 26 years. There is no one more akin to the lowest species of pond life than someone who makes a speech for no other purpose than deliberately to prevent Members of Parliament from coming to a decision.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) made a splendid speech in which he referred to *The Independent*. He said that it has not been telling people what has been happening about the European Community. If that newspaper is guilty of that charge, may I appeal to it, if any hon. Member tries to talk out the Bill and prevent a vote being taken, to publish his picture on the front page tomorrow. Whether they be

Labour, Liberal, Ulstermen or Conservatives, *The Independent* should let the people know who is stopping Members of Parliament from coming to a decision.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills is a credit to democracy. We are about to face a general election. If all of us had been successful in the ballot for private Member's Bills, would we not have been tempted to do something nice about old people, or dogs, or helping people across the road—something popular, something positive? However, my hon. Friend has rightly said that even though it will make him unpopular with some, he wants to face up to this basic democratic issue. It is time that we did. Our complaint is not against the Conservative or Labour parties but that people have simply not been told what is happening with the EC.

An hon. Friend said, "Why not have a Committee?" I am on one of these stupid Committees that consider European legislation. What can we do? If we say, "We think that this is dreadful, is scandalous, will destroy jobs and will cost a fortune", it is not necessarily reported to the House. The Government can table their own motion, but what happens if we table a motion? Nothing.

I have had complaints from bus owners in my constituency about a recent regulation on the speed of buses. They said that it was silly, would cost a fortune and would not help anyone and asked what I could do about it. I said that it was discussed at the Council of Ministers and that it was passed under majority voting despite Britain not wanting it. The Minister was not present because his bus or train had been held up.

We have no power. The time has come to tell people what is happening. If they vote for the EC, that is fine, but let them decide. It is wrong to hide it from them. If anyone knows, you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, know how we hide what is happening from people. You have to sit in the Chair late at night—at midnight or 1 am or 2 am—when we discuss all the nasty things that are going on in the EC. Nobody hears about them because there is hardly anyone here to comment on them. You also know about the Committees where power is disappearing.

People must be told. If we simply allow more and more power to pass to the EC without telling people, at some point they will wake up, but what will they do when they wake up? How will they vote? It will not matter at all. If people's democratic powers continue to be removed, there will be a huge explosion from them. That should be the fear of every democrat.

We cannot say that people are not worried about it. We find that people are worried about the disappearance of their laws. Hon. Members should think about the number of people who have written to them about Sunday trading. We have had to tell them, "We cannot do anything until the European Court tells us what we are allowed to do." People complained to me last week that the European Community is spending more than £1,000 million on growing and dumping high-tar tobacco in the third world. People are suffering and dying in the third world, but we can do absolutely nothing about it.

We know that expenditure on the CAP is breaking all records, but we can do nothing about it. Despite the wonderful rebates that the previous Prime Minister achieved, Britain still has to pay £2·5 billion. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills is so right. If people want this to continue, they can vote for it and if they complain in the future we can say, "You voted for it; it is your responsibility." But if we take away all the people's powers, step by step, and if we hide it from them deliberately, as we do by having late-night votes and pretending that things do not happen, at some stage there will be an explosion in our country. People will get very angry if they feel that their powers have been thrown away.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) said that we do not want a referendum because people will vote against the CAP and not for more money for farmers. He suggested that, irrespective of the views of people, there are some things that we cannot allow them to do. That is one point of view. I think that my hon. Friend is a Conservative—I am not sure—but that is what he was saying.

Hon. Members have powers entrusted to them by the people. The Labour or Conservative parties can do what they like with those powers. They can pass the laws that they want. They can govern stupidly, which might happen under the Liberal Democrats, but at some time every five years the people have a chance to say, "We think that you have done well" or "You have made a mess of it." The only thing that we do not have the right to do is to pass that power over. We do not have the right to do that unless the people give us their support. That is the issue that we are discussing today and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills, because he has done a service for democracy by making us face the issue. We must say yes or no and if any hon. Member from any party tries to stop us coming to a decision, that will be a shame on democracy and I hope that his photograph will be splashed on the front page of *The Independent* and every other newspaper in Britain.

2.24 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): The Bill so ably presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) relates to what I consider to be the biggest issue to have faced the nation in my lifetime, barring only one other.

In the 1950s and 1960s there was another political issue of fundamental importance to the nation on which there was no public debate. The public were not consulted and, more importantly, the issues, arguments and consequences were, I think deliberately, not presented. Those who spoke out in the House were pilloried for their trouble. The consequences, as the House knows, is that we now live in a multiracial society. Never again must the whole culture of our nation be so fundamentally altered without the people being consulted, because the people have an inalienable rights in these matters. It is the people whose lives will be affected, not in the way that those of Ministers and mandarins are affected but in every detail. It is important that we—the politicians of the nation—put fairly and squarely to the people the issues and arguments and, more to the point, the consequences. I stress in particular the consequences of the treaty of Maastricht, because, as many hon. Members have said, they are irreversible and, unlike domestic policy, they cannot be reversed.

I said a moment ago that I was most concerned that people should have the consequences of these steps pointed out to them. One has to look no further than the common agricultural policy to see the effect of political and economic union. The CAP is, to all intents and purposes, a microcosm of a political and economic union with its own form of legislation, its own currency in the

[Mr. Christopher Gill]

green currencies and even its own monetary system through the monetary compensatory amounts. What are the consequences? They are the enormous, unsustainable high cost of the CAP, record low incomes for farmers and the production of food that people will never eat.

I represent a large and important rural constituency. My farmers tell me what they think about the CAP and about their future. I relay their concerns to the Minister and on many occasions he might agree, but the reality is that he can do nothing because unless and until he can get the agreement of the other nations in the European Community, we are lumbered with what we have.

I do not want the Chancellor of the Exchequer of this country ever to be put in the same hapless position as the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, but that would be the effect of introducing a single currency. With one currency, we would have but one Chancellor and he would not be at No. 11 Downing street.

The danger to the House is that ultimately there would be such disillusionment with hon. Members and the parties represented in the House that we would see the emergence of that very phenomenon to which the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) who spoke for the Liberal Democrats, drew our attention—nationalism. An awesome example of where that leads us can be found in the events in the USSR and eastern Europe.

2.29 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I profoundly disagree with this silly Bill, and I think that we would be doing a disservice to the House and to the country if it were allowed to get into Committee. It is for that reason that I am talking now. What we have to discuss is whether we approve of the mechanism of the referendum. I do not——

Sir Teddy Taylor *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House proceeded to a Division—

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon) *(seated and covered)*: On point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I think that I can anticipate the hon. Gentleman's point of order. I understand that the Division Bells have been ringing within the Palace of Westminster, but that there is some doubt whether they have been ringing throughout. In view of that, I propose to add two minutes to the time allowed before the doors are locked.

Mr. Cash *(seated and covered)*: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If hon. Members could not hear the Division Bells because they were not ringing, they can do nothing about that, whether or not they have an extra two minutes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is reasonably clear to me that the Division Bells have been ringing in most of the Palace of Westminster, but I have added two minutes to ensure that every hon. Member who desires to vote will have an opportunity to do that.

Mr. John Marshall *(seated and covered)*: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Hon. Members expect a Division to take place at 2.30 pm. If they do not hear the Division Bells ring at 2.30 they will not sit around for another 12 minutes on the offchance that they might ring.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We will not have a debate on the matter. I have given my ruling.

The House having divided: Ayes 46, Noes 3.

Division No. 90] **[2.29 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan	Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Alison, Rt Hon Michael	Michael, Alun
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*	Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Beggs, Roy	Paisley, Rev Ian
Body, Sir Richard	Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*	Robertson, George
Browne, John *(Winchester)*	Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*	Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Carttiss, Michael	Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Cash, William	Skinner, Dennis
Cohen, Harry	Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Cox, Tom	Spearing, Nigel
Cran, James	Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Crowther, Stan	Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Cryer, Bob	Taylor, Sir Teddy
Dykes, Hugh	Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Favell, Tony	Trimble, David
Gill, Christopher	Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*	Wigley, Dafydd
Hunter, Andrew	Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Lawrence, Ivan	
Leighton, Ron	**Tellers for the Ayes:**
Lord, Michael	Mr. Humfrey Malins and
McCrea, Rev William	Mr. Toby Jessel.

NOES

Bottomley, Peter	**Tellers for the Noes:**
Irvine, Michael	Sir Anthony Meyer and
Sedgemore, Brian	Mr. Robert G. Hughes.

Whereupon MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *declared that the Question was not decided in the affirmative, because it was not supported by the majority prescribed by Standing Order No. 36 (Majority for Closure or for proposal of question).*

Debate to be resumed on Friday 28 February.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May we have a statement, perhaps on Monday, from Foreign Office Ministers assuring us that they did not switch off the Division Bells in the outer Buildings of the House?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I can forthwith give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks.

Private Members' Bills

SHOPS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Before I give the date for the Second Reading, I draw your attention to the fact that on this occasion, the Government were asked clearly to define their position. Today we debated a Bill about a referendum, and we talked about votes in this House and in other places. The vote giving permission for me to introduce the Shops (Amendment) Bill was 222 to four.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am finding it difficult to understand the point of order for the Chair. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will come to it.

Mr. Powell: I am coming to it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am a part of the usual channels, and we use the usual channels for debates on Fridays, as you know. You will take cognisance of the fact that, last Friday, through the agreement of the usual channels, two Bills were passed at this time of day. The Second and Third Readings were passed by agreement through the usual channels. Being a part of the usual channels, I took advice and wrote to the Minister with responsibility for the Bill. It is a reforming Bill——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have been very tolerant. The hon. Gentleman really must come to his point of order for me. I think that I have the drift of it, but he must come to it quickly.

Mr. Powell: You are most tolerant in the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I am grateful to you for that. It is very difficult to explain all the complex problems, particularly when it comes to private Members' Bills.

Only yesterday, the Minister of State, Home Office, replied to me in a letter regarding my request for Government co-operation to ensure that the Shops (Amendment) Bill went further than Second Reading. In the third paragraph of her letter, she said that any Bill, unless it had the approval of the Government, would not proceed further. We have ten-minute Bills, private Members' Bills and a ballot for private Members' Bills. The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) was fortunate enough to win a place in the ballot to enable him to introduce his Bill. I stayed up all night to get a spot for my ten-minute Bill. The motion was passed in the House, as I have mentioned——

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): What is the point of order?

Mr. Powell: My point of order is that if it means that we must have Government approval before a Bill may be read a Second time, why do we go to all the trouble of trying to obtain a spot, either in private Members' time or to introduce a ten-minute Bill?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is an experienced and respected Member of the House, and he knows the procedure very well. It does not operate only at 2.30 pm on Fridays; it operates at other times, too. If an hon. Member shouts, "Object," the Bill can go no further on that occasion. That is exactly what happened this afternoon. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Powell: Next Friday.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 28 February.

CIVIL RIGHTS (DISABLED PERSONS) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [31 January].

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Debate to be resumed what day?

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I did not hear any objection.

Mr. Cohen: There was no objection.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I clearly heard an objection, and I am asking the right hon. Gentleman whether he wishes to name a day to resume the debate.

Mr. Morris: Friday next.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 28 February.

Mr. Alfred Morris: On a point of order Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not time that the Select Committee on Procedure again looked urgently at what is now a seriously anomalous position? Whereas the television viewer can see who objected—I am now informed that it was the hon. Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker), acting for the Government—the reader of *Hansard* cannot be told who objected. It must be a serious anomaly that one can see on television who destroyed an opportunity to give a Bill a Second Reading but cannot read it in *Hansard*. Surely that is especially unfortunate in the case of a Bill now being discussed in the House of Lords, which was talked out on 31 January by a Member who has since apologised for his conduct.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It has never been the practice for the hon. Member who objects to further proceedings on a Bill to identify himself. The matter has been referred to the Procedure Committee in the past. If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to refer it again, I am sure that he will do so. We must now proceed.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I will first take the remaining Orders of the Day.

CRIMINAL INSTRUCTION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

COLD WEATHER CREDITS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): With the permission of the Member in charge of the Bill, Friday next.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 28 February.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 28 February.

TIMESHARE CONTRACTS (TIME FOR RECONSIDERATION) (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Ray Powell: With permission, Friday next.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 28 February.

HOUSING (FITNESS STANDARD) (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Ray Powell: With permission, Friday next.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 28 February.

ANIMAL EXPERIMENTATION (COSMETICS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Ray Powell: With permission, Friday next.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 28 February.

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (SUPPLY OF MEDICAL EQUIPMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Ray Powell: With permission, Friday next.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 28 February.

FIREARMS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for consideration read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There have now been five Bills in succession on which we have not heard anyone object. We cannot hear any objection. A guilty whisper——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We will deal with the Firearms (Amendment) Bill again to make certain that there is no confusion.

Mr. Ray Powell: On that matter——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Gentleman objecting?

Mr. Powell: No.

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered. Bill read the Third time, and passed.

TIMESHARE BILL

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered. Read the Third time, and passed.

PRISONS (REHABILITATION OF DRUG ADDICTS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

EUROPEAN STANDING COMMITTEES

Ordered,

That European Community Documents Nos. 8810/91, relating to the right of asylum, and 8811/91, relating to immigration, shall not stand referred to European Standing Committee B.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 2nd March, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), Mr. Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to Asylum and Immigration not later than Seven o'clock.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Points of Order

2.53 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, concerning the vote on the closure motion on the Referendum Bill. Would it be possible for you to inquire where in the precincts of the House the bells did not ring and to report to the House on Monday or at your convenience?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I made inquiries and it seemed clear to me that the bells were operating in most places. As there might have been some slight doubt, I added two minutes to the Division.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker concerning the Shops (Amendment) Bill, which deals with Sunday trading and was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell). There has been reluctance on the part of the Government to make proposals to deal with Sunday trading and there has been an extraordinarily helpful and detailed White Paper——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot debate the Bill now. If there is a point of order I shall take it.

Mr. Michael: Yes, indeed. My point of order is this. As we have seen the White Paper, as the Bill is in detail before us—in greater detail than many Bills introduced by the Government—as there was a vote of 224 to 4 for the Bill to be debated, and as I presented a plea to the House from my council of churches and all the bishops in Wales——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is attempting to debate the Bill.

Mr. Michael: No. The point of order is that, given all that background, is it not an outrage that we are not allowed to debate the Bill? Will you use your good offices to persuade the Government to make a statement early next week to explain how they will respond to the fact that one solitary voice—which has now disappeared—called against the Bill? That would give the House the opportunity to debate the issues properly and constructively, so that legislation could be clear to the general public and to business. Will you use your good offices to that effect?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have many duties, but one of them is not to persuade the Government to make statements. However, I am sure that what the hon. Gentleman has said will have been heard by those on the Government Front Bench.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I appreciate that you heard an objection to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, but others did not. May we have some clarification of whether the Government, who have presided over anti-discrimination legislation on employment in Northern Ireland and on race and religion throughout the United Kingdom, object to civil rights for disabled people? I speak for the people of Northern Ireland, who are concerned about the issue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot debate the matter now.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill was talked out by the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward). Today, when the motion to resume the debate was moved, you were close to the Government Whip, the hon. Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker), and you heard him object—or perhaps the Clerk did. One thing is certain: Opposition Members did not hear the guilty whisper. Under Standing Orders, if hon. Members object, they have to object not merely to you, but to the House. The Government Whip also whispered "Object" to the Cold Weather Credits Bill, to the Housing (Fitness Standard) (Amendment) Bill and to the Animal Experimentation (Cosmetics) Bill. We would prefer him to stand up and be man enough to tell the world what the Government are up to.

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have a duty to ensure in future that if hon. Members object from a sedentary position they speak out so that everyone knows who the guilty people on the Government Front Bench are who are stopping the passage of important Bills on behalf of people such as the disabled. It really is a scandal.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is my job to carry out the procedures of the House as they are at present. We have been round this course many times at 2.30 pm on a Friday, and if hon. Members wish the procedure to be changed I suggest that they put their point to the Select Committee on Procedure.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is absolutely outrageous that the Government Whip should object in a whisper to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. You may have heard him, but I suspect that the majority of hon. Members in the House did not hear him. How are Members to follow proceedings if we do not know what is going on? There could be chaos. We might all be speaking together and it would become a tower of Babel. It is disgraceful that the Government Whip should object to such an important Bill in a whisper. It should be made known clearly. The Whips should be made to stand up and object, if that is what they propose to do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is my job to ensure that the current procedures of the House are carried out. If hon. Members are dissatisfied, they are free to put their points to the Select Committee on Procedure.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Further to that important point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Other than when there is a Division or when a point of order is raised during a Division, you would insist that all legitimate interventions must be made by an hon. Member on his feet. Sedentary interventions are not accepted by the Chair. Therefore, will you consider the fact that sedentary objections are not a legitimate or acceptable part of the business of the House? Whoever objects should stand on his feet to register the objection.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The short answer is that that is not the case with objections and never has been.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I can confirm what so many other hon. Members have said—that when the third motion was put, we could not hear the word "Object" being said. I did hear a noise but I do not know what it

[Mr. David Trimble]

was. Being so much closer to the possible source of the noise, you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may have heard the word "Object", but there was so much background noise that there is a serious danger that you or the Clerks might hear another noise, such as someone clearing his throat or two hon. Members whispering to one another, and think that the word has been uttered. If the word "Object" is not said clearly, there is a serious danger that you or the Clerks may be misled.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am giving away no secrets when I tell the House that the Chair has powerful amplifiers that enable me to hear very distinctly everything that is said.

Singleton Hospital, Swansea

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

3.2 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): I am sorry that I have had to ask the Minister of State to come here for this debate today. We last personally debated the subject together about seven years ago and we are now here to debate the proposal by West Glamorgan health authority to withdraw funding for the night casualty service at Singleton hospital.

It is a sad example of the determination of a quango to ignore the wishes of the people it is supposed to serve. As early as a decade ago, with no consultation, the predecessor of that quango closed the casualty unit completely. I campaigned to get it opened and, with the support of the then Secretary of State, it was reopened. But, even then, the authority defied the Secretary of State and refused to open at night. I then had to campaign again and, with the help of the then Secretary of State, we forced it to operate a night service.

Ever since the unit was reopened, that health authority has been determined to undermine it. From the moment it reopened it said that it would not allow casualty cases the use of the X-ray facilities or the X-ray staff in Singleton hospital, although those are under-utilised at present.

More importantly, the health authority has issued a ruling that is intended to kill the casualty unit—not just the night unit but the day unit. It has said that ambulances are not allowed to take patients, at any time of day or night, to Singleton unless it is a life-threatening case.

The authority has been manoeuvring for three years to get to this stage and it is within a week of the final consideration of its proposal to close the night unit. It is an example of the fanaticism and malevolence of certain individuals in that authority that the chief executive said, in a recent interview:

"No matter how much money the Government gives us, Singleton's casualty service will be a low priority."

Despite 30,000 signatures on a petition presented by the people of West Glamorgan to keep the unit open, that is the attitude of an unelected, unanswerable, self-opinionated bunch of Welsh Office placemen.

I wish to expose the cynical deception that underlies the case. The health authority's case is that it has to save £74,000, and that that is the only way to do so. Two of the people whom the authority has recently appointed to implement the Government's health reforms have salaries totalling £69,000. As those health reforms will lapse after the election, that money will be available immediately. However, that might be deemed to be a political point. Even the £74,000 figure is fraudulent because the unit general manager, David Williams, said that he is willing to provide the unit for £50,000, but the health authority has ignored the offer. In fact, Singleton makes £60,000 in income from its casualty unit.

The saving that the authority wants to make could be more than achieved if only it would lift its ludicrous ruling on the use of ambulances. I have figures from the authority showing that it costs £17 for an ambulance to take somebody from the Singleton area the 9·5 miles to Morriston, with the ambulance then returning to its depot. If we take it that the true saving that it needs to make is £50,000, it need only cut the number of return journeys by

ambulance four times a day—that is, one journey every six hours. If it wanted to save that money, it would scrap the rule on ambulances.

I know that I have the Minister's support on that because he was kind enough to say so. On 14 November 1985, he agreed with the view of everyone in west Swansea, including the staff of Singleton hospital, that if Singleton is the nearest casualty unit, casualties should be taken there first. He said that

"any patient who cannot be treated properly at a minor casualty unit could, if necessary, be transported urgently by ambulance to Morriston."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 1985; Vol. 86, c. 785.]

He accepted that the logic was to take those patients to the nearest hospital first and, if the cases were severe, then take them to Morriston. I know that the right hon. Gentleman will underline that statement even more firmly today because, since he made it, two major units—the children's unit and the maternity unit—have moved from Morriston to Singleton, so the case is even stronger.

The deception is beyond all that. The authority tried to delude people with the idea that there would be massive provision of additional cataract operations when the casualty unit closed. When I met the chief executive, he spoke of hundreds. The Minister knows my habit of looking at figures and taking them apart. I did that with the figures from the health authority and found that the hundreds became 70 and, if the true amount needed to be saved were £50,000, the hundreds become fewer than 50.

So embarrassed is the authority and its chief executive by the exposure of that cruel con trick, that it has now started adding hip operations. It is nonsense. The Minister knows Swansea. Recently, a ship sank off Mumbles head. The ambulances drove straight past the entrance to Singleton hospital and went on for another 9·5 miles to Morriston, although every one of those patients could have been dealt with at Singleton. A fortnight ago, a school bus crashed into a nurses' home at the rear of Singleton hospital, yet 38 children were taken not to Singleton but the 9·5 miles to Morriston. They could have had immediate treatment at Singleton.

Under the ruling, eye cases, spontaneous abortions, accidents to children and so on, if they are dealt with by ambulance, have to go to Morriston then be brought back to Singleton at a return cost of £34 each trip. The Minister knows how difficult it can be for people. He said that he appreciated that there would be difficulties for patients who had not been severely injured to get to Morriston under their own steam. Bus services have now been severely curtailed.

I have support for my campaign from all the local councils and local Members—my hon. Friends the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell), for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) and for Neath (Mr. Hain), Swansea city council, Clwyd Valley council, Neath borough council, Port Talbot borough council and West Glamorgan county council. The health authority ignored a petition of more than 30,000 on the ground that the signatures had been collected before it had spelt out its option on cataract operations.

Support for the health authority consists of 16 organisations, an bunch of eight slave committees and employees, plus Powys and Dyfed county councils. Heaven knows what they are doing in this consultation. Incidentally, the health authority is so desperate that it has even asked Gwynedd county council if it thought that the Swansea casualty unit should be closed at night. That is the degree of desperation. It can get no significant support for its campaign.

Public opinion is overwhelming. I again thank the Minister for his support when we last debated the matter and, on the basis on a petition of 7,000, he said:

"I can assure . . . the people of Swansea that should the matter come before my right hon. Friend again he will require a great deal of convincing that the service should not be provided in accordance with the wishes that so many of the population have voiced."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 1985; Vol. 86, c. 782.]

In the past 12 months I have presented a petition of 30,000 signatures and next week I will present a new petition collected since the option was spelt out, which will consist of more than 40,000 signatures—one third of the electorate of the Gower and Swansea, West constituencies combined.

Evening Post opinion polls showed, before the options were spelt out, 4:1 in favour of keeping the night unit open, and on 29 January, since the options were spelt out, more than 26:1 in favour of keeping the night unit open.Where is the citizens charter? Or is there a special clause in it excluding West Glamorgan? The West Glamorgan health authority dedicated a whole edition of its in-house magazine to telling its employees about the requirements of the citizens charter. Unfortunately, it itself seemed to neglect to read that particular edition.

The people of west Swansea and Gower are disgusted at the health authority's suggestion that from 1 April 1993 the unit, if it is to continue, should be financed by "novel" means. What an attitude to a casualty unit for a city of that size. I urge the Secretary of State, as I did in a letter, for pity's sake, sack this wretched health authority before it does more harm to the people of west Swansea and Gower. Next week I shall present the petition to the Secretary of State and at the end of the week the consultation period will be over. The Welsh Office has already spent two years considering the case for closure. There is no reason for further consideration. It knows the arguments. All it needs to do now is count the heads.

After the petition has been presented we expect the Secretary of State to give us a decision before the general election—no messing about, no fudging. We want to know where the Welsh Office stands. The people of Gower and west Swansea will well understand if, after two years of consideration, the Secretary of State cannot announce his decision before the general election: it will be because he is afraid to tell them what he intends to do with the casualty unit.

3.13 pm

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir Wyn Roberts): Although I fully realise the importance of these proposals to the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) and his constituents, I must make it clear that as the one-month period for representations to be made to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has begun, it would be wholly inappropriate for me to make any substantial comments on this matter. The right hon. Gentleman is well aware of that.

I can assure all those who have submitted comments on the health authority's proposals for the minor casualty unit at Singleton that their views will be fully considered before my right hon. Friend reaches his decision on this matter. I would also urge all those who wish to comment

[Sir Wyn Roberts]

on the proposal, but have not yet done so, to submit their views to my Department before the one-month period for objections ends on 28 February.

It would be helpful, I am sure, if I briefly set out the type of service that the minor casualty unit provides, as I believe that there has been some misunderstanding about this. The minor casualty unit at Singleton hospital is very much a minor casualty unit offering a service that, in many ways, is comparable with that found in good GP surgeries or health centres. The unit does not have the back-up services that would normally be expected at a major accident and emergency department, such as Morriston hospital, where all such services are available.

The provision of a minor casualty unit at Singleton and the services to be provided by such a unit has, as the right hon. Member for Swansea, West emphasised, been the subject of considerable local debate in recent years. He and I debated the matter in November 1985. To assess the unit's possible future role and contribution, my Department reviewed it in May 1990. The review acknowledged that the unit was providing an important and useful daytime service to the public.

Owing to the very limited use made of the night-time service—I shall touch on this matter again later—the review questioned the need for such a service, while recognising that the decision on whether to maintain the service was one for the local health authority. The review was carried out purely to inform debate on the future of the service. At that time, neither the health authority nor my right hon. Friend had made any decisions on the issue. I can assure the right hon. Member and those who are concerned about the proposal that my right hon. Friend has an open mind about the future of the unit. Indeed, as I said earlier, he will consider in full all representations made to him on this matter before making any decision on the authority's proposals.

I believe that it is important not to lose sight of what the health authority is proposing for the unit. Under its proposals the unit would continue to provide a basic service between 8 am and 11 pm at night—that is, it would continue to provide a service to local people for 15 hours a day. Neither the existing day service nor emergency admission arrangements at the hospital would be affected by the proposals, so the proposal is limited to the service provided after 11 pm and before 8 am.

The authority's view is that the withdrawal of the night-time minor casualty service at Singleton would not have an adverse impact on the population of the area. The authority has pointed out that on average only four people attend the unit between the hours of 11 pm and 8 am, and that the full accident and emergency services available at either Morriston or Neath hospitals would provide a more than satisfactory alternative service.

Mr. Alan Williams: How does the Minister reconcile that with what he said in 1985? He said:

"I appreciate that there could be difficulties for patients who are not severely injured in reaching Morriston under their own steam."—[*Official Report* 14 November 1985; Vol. 86, c. 786.]

The Minister applied that to the whole 24-hour period. It is even more relevant after 8 pm.

Sir Wyn Roberts: What I said in 1985 is, I am sure, still relevant to the position today, although of course one has to take into account whatever changes may have taken place. However, I explained to the right hon. Gentleman that I could make no substantial comment during this debate while the consultation period is still open. I do not think that he will interpret my reply to his intervention as being other than a contribution to the material that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will consider.

The authority believes that the funds used to purchase the night service could be put to better use. It has proposed that the savings should be used to improve the health status of the elderly population in West Glamorgan by dealing with the increasing number of elderly people waiting for cataract operations.

Although the procedures for cataract operations are not too complex, the impact that those operations can have on the quality of life of those who require such treatment should not be underestimated. I understand that the authority has forecast that the funds freed by these proposals would enable it to perform more than 70 additional cataract operations a year.

Whether the authority is right and the changes proposed in the provision of health care will lead to an acceptable service is a matter which my right hon. Friend will consider when reaching a decision on the proposals. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that his points will be carefully considered before any decision is taken.

It may help if I put this minor casualty unit in proper perspective and say something in defence of West Glamorgan health authority. Since 1979, the authority has increased its front-line staff—its doctors and nurses—by nearly 36 per cent., a rise of more than one third. That has enabled it to boost in-patient and day case activity by 60 per cent. over the period, with a dramatic 273 per cent. rise for day cases alone.

In 1991-92, the authority is forecasting an increase of nearly 2 per cent. in in-patient and day case admissions, with a rise of more than 15 per cent. in day case treatment alone. That significant increase in activity has allowed it to forecast that, by the end of March, no one in the county should have to wait more than one month for urgent treatment or more than two years for non-urgent care. Looking ahead to 1992-93, the authority's provisional health plan signals a 7·5 per cent. increase in new out-patient attendances and a 6 per cent. rise in in-patient and day case admissions—a rise of more than 4,700 cases compared with the projected outturn for the present year. That is a splendid record by any yardstick and the health authority should be congratulated on it.

Mr. Alan Williams: Before the Minister concludes his apologia on behalf of the health authority, does he agree that it is absurd that it is costing £74,000 to keep the unit underused, whereas the authority would save more money, and therefore be able to do more cataract operations, if it changed the ambulance rule in line with the Minister's suggestion in the 1985 debate?

Sir Wyn Roberts: As I told the right hon. Gentleman, each point will be carefully considered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, including the point that he has just made.

For those who are not familiar with it, it may help if I outline the details of the procedures that must be followed before a substantial change in the use of health buildings can be made.

Responsibility for the detailed planning of health services and for local consultation on the plans rests, in the first instance, with district health authorities. In developing their plans, authorities are required to have in mind the need to make the most efficient use of their available resources, bearing in mind the changing needs of patients. Ultimate ownership of all health authority buildings is normally vested in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Any proposals for permanent closure or change of use can and do have a significant impact on the local community. Special arrangements have, therefore, been designed to ensure that the public and all local interests are fully consulted. In addition, when there is any objection to the way in which services are to be developed, the procedure is that my right hon. Friend is required to decide on the proposals in full knowledge of any objections.

Guidance is given to health authorities in health service planning paper No. 5 entitled "Procedure for Consultation on the Closure and Change for Use of Health Buildings". That has been replaced by the guidance issued last summer, although the proposals for the Singleton minor casualty service were subject to consultation before the new guidance was issued.

The procedure being followed in this case can be summarised as follows: the health authority should first prepare a consultation document spelling out the reasons why changes are necesary; the implications for patients, such as travelling and transport; the options that have been considered and the arguments put forward in favour of them. The relationship between the closure or change of use and other developments in the district's plans should also be drawn out.

A three-month period of consultation is the next stage, with comments invited from community health councils, local authorities, joint staff consultative committees and other local interests. The health authority should then reconsider the proposed closure or change of use in the light of the comments received. Should the proposal meet with local agreement, and be in accordance with guidelines from the Welsh Office, the health authority may proceed with the closure or change of use without further ado.

If the result is either resolute opposition or a locally agreed conclusion that differs substantially from the original proposals, the authority is required to refer the matter with its recommendations and an outline of the alternative arrangements to my right hon. Friend.

So that members of the public who oppose the proposals may have an oppportunity to make their views known before a final decision is taken by the Secretary of State, a further period of one month is allowed and publicly announced. That is the position that we have reached.

West Glamorgan health authority has implemented this guidance as follows: comments on the proposals were invited in June 1991, with the closing date for comments being 9 September 1991. The authority's proposals on the future of the night-time minor casualty service at Singleton, together with copies of all representations received, were submitted to my right hon. Friend under cover of a letter dated 7 February 1992.

In presenting its proposals, the authority recognised that there was some local support for a continued 24-hour minor casualty service. As a result, the authority decided to continue to fund the service until 1 April 1993 while, at the same time, asking the local community to identify ways of maintaining the night-time service after that date. We are now receiving representations made in responce to the one-month period announced in the public notice on 31 January 1992. All these representations will be fully considered before the final decision is made.

Mr. Alan Williams: Will the Minister of State avoid giving the slightly erroneous impression that the first that the Secretary of State heard of this was in February? Will he confirm that the details contained in that submission in February under a covering letter are exactly the same as those of which the Welsh Office has been aware for many months and which have been under discussion and exploration by his officials for many months? All he needs to know now is the magnitude and scale of the opposition to the proposals before making his decision.

Sir Wyn Roberts: As I said at the beginning, and as the right hon. Gentleman said, we are both aware that this problem has been around for some years. We are dealing with a different aspect from that with which we dealt in November 1985, but, essentially, the problems revolve around the casualty unit at Singleton. I also said that we tried to ensure that anyone who had not made representations and who wished to do so now had an opportunity to do so in the final month before my right hon. Friend comes to a decision.

Once my right hon. Friend has reached a conclusion on the health authority's proposals, a letter giving his decision and the reasons for it will be sent to the health authority. Copies of the letter will be sent to other people or bodies who have expressed an interest in the matter, including the right hon. Gentleman, and the decisions will be publicised by means of a press release. Once again, I assure the right hon. Gentleman and all those who have made representations to my right hon. Friend that he will give this matter the fullest possible consideration before he comes to his decision.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 24 February 1992

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY

Electricity Disconnections

1. **Mr. Ground:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairmen of the regional electricity companies to discuss levels of disconnection for debt.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I am delighted that the number of disconnections for debt has continued to fall. In 1991, the figure for England and Wales was less than a third of what it was 10 years ago.

Mr. Ground: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Is it right to see in the big reduction in disconnections signs of a different attitude on the part of the electricity companies to their customers and signs of better management since the companies were privatised, and is there scope for further improvement in this respect?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, the sharpest reduction in disconnections for debt has occurred since the companies were put into the private sector. I believe that they are now closer to their customers and more able to cater for the needs of their customers, including those who fall behind with their payments. I look forward to further reductions in unnecessary disconnections and I know that that is also the desire of the independent electricity regulator.

Mr. Harry Barnes: The reason why there are fewer disconnections is that the electricity companies have introduced card meters, so that people cut themselves off rather than having to be cut off by the electricity companies. Moreover, there is an absence of facilities for obtaining cards for the meters, so that many people who have to use them have to spend a considerable amount of money on travelling to get hold of cards. As the meters are now in operation, will the Minister take action to ensure that dispenser facilities are more widely available?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The installation of pre-payment meters is one reason why the number of disconnections has fallen, but more important is the fact that the regional electricity companies, under the terms of their licence, have to approve a code of conduct with the Office of Electricity Regulation and must offer customers who are in genuine difficulties a payment plan so that debt can be paid off over a period. If customers agree a payment plan, they will not be disconnected. That is a very much better arrangement than that which pertained more than 10 years ago, when a state-controlled monopoly was only too ready to disconnect customers without agreeing such arrangements.

Mr. Dobson: What are the prospects of disconnection for industrial customers in the coming year if they cannot afford to pay the exorbitant increases that the electricity companies are seeking from them? For instance, Fields Packaging of Bradford has been asked to pay 30 per cent. more, and Ibstock Brick in Leicestershire has been asked to pay between 20 and 30 per cent. more. How can the Minister or the companies justify increases of five to seven times the rate of inflation?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We are anxious that all industrial customers should have access to competitively priced electricity and I am pleased to say that an independent survey showed that in the first year after privatisation three quarters of those customers experienced at least a 10 per cent. reduction in their bills. Any subsequent increases should be seen in that context. Moreover, it should be an embarrassment to the hon. Gentlemen to be reminded that under the last Labour Government prices for domestic customers rose by 22 per cent. in real terms. That was a scandalous neglect of the interests of those customers and it will not be repeated under this Government.

Coal Prices

3. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the discussions taking place in the European Community about setting an EC-wide reference price for the cost of coal.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. John Wakeham): No, Sir, because there are no such discussions. The Commission has made it clear that it has no proposals for guide prices on coal contracts or for Community subsidies for coal production. Its ideas on "reference prices" are aimed at reducing the amounts of aid for coal production that member states may give to their industries.

Mr. Williams: Will the Minister confirm that, at about £42 a tonne, the average price of British coal is well below that of west German coal?

Dr. Kim Howells: Which costs two or three times as much.

Mr. Williams: That is right—two or three times as much. As Europe moves to become a single market, does it make any sense that Britain should be closing coal mines which are producing coal far cheaper than those in west Germany? Why are the Government so intent on destroying the industry through imports, through the dash for gas, and through their privatisation proposals? Would it not make more sense to have a moratorium on pit closures in the interests of jobs, the balance of payments and European energy conservation?

Mr. Wakeham: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that British coal is the cheapest in western Europe, but it is certainly not cheaper than coal from the United States or Australia and it is still uncompetitive in world terms. However, the next coal contracts will be at competitive rates and I believe that they will be satisfactory for British Coal.

Sir John Hannam: Does my right hon. Friend agree that such a proposal about coal imports would be in direct conflict with the objectives of GATT and of free trade and would also result in the removal of the need for competitiveness in British Coal, which would work to the disadvantage of the consumer?

Mr. Wakeham: I agree with my hon. Friend. I do not believe that those questions have been properly thought through. There are questions about our international obligations to GATT and to the Community. There are also implications for the steel industry and, as my hon. Friend pointed out, there are implications for electricity consumers. It is not in the long-term interests of the British coal industry not to become efficient and competitive.

Mr. Redmond: If the Secretary of State wishes to be believed at the Dispatch Box, he must honour what he says at the Dispatch Box. During the last Energy Question Time, more than a fortnight ago, he promised to write to me but he has failed to do so. If he makes statements from the Dispatch Box, he should be a man of honour and honour his promises.

Mr. Wakeham: I have to say that I have no idea what the hon. Gentleman is talking about.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the interests of my coal mining constituents would best be served by long-term contracts with the generators, which the British coal industry is well placed to secure and which the generators should welcome, and not by market rigging by Labour politicians posing as experts?

Mr. Wakeham: I agree with my hon. Friend. British Coal is in a position to sign long-term contracts with the generators, which will be very much in the interests of British Coal and the electricity consumers.

Mr. Barron: If the Secretary of State regards protecting the British coal industry and, therefore, the nation from the fluctuation in world prices as rigging the market, will he explain why he has done exactly that by rigging the market for nuclear electricity in this country?

Mr. Wakeham: The arguments for nuclear electricity were different—*[Interruption.]* Oh, yes. We argued, rightly, that we believed in a diversity of supply and we wanted to ensure that that diversity of supply was available. We believe that British Coal can achieve a significant share of the coal market for generation in the new contracts which begin in 1993, and we believe that it will be able to achieve that at competitive prices.

Unleaded Petrol

4. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the current level of unleaded petrol sales in the United Kingdom; and what comparable figures he has for EC member states.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Colin Moynihan): Unleaded petrol sales in the United Kingdom currently account for nearly 44 per cent. of all petrol sales. The United Kingdom Petroleum Industry Association estimates that in 1990 the market share of unleaded petrol in other European Community countries was as follows: unified Germany 71 per cent., Denmark 58 per cent., Netherlands 49 per cent., Luxembourg 32 per cent., Belgium 27 per cent., Eire 20 per cent., France 14 per cent., Italy 5 per cent., Greece 3 per cent., Spain 1 per cent., Portugal 1 per cent. The comparable United Kingdom figure for this period was 34 per cent.

Mr. Hague: Does my hon. Friend agree that those figures reflect a sharp improvement in this country over the past few years and scope for some of our Community partners to do more to encourage unleaded petrol sales? Does my hon. Friend expect that unleaded petrol sales in Scotland would improve if the petroleum engineering directorate were relocated to Aberdeen?

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is to announce today that he is appointing Ernst and Young management consultants to undertake an independent study of the case for and against relocating the Department of Energy's petroleum engineering directorate to Aberdeen. Whatever the findings on relocation, there may well be an impact on the level of unleaded petrol sales in Scotland and thus in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Simon Hughes As the Minister's first answer made it clear that a price differential has been a major cause of the substantial increase in sales of unleaded petrol, and as the Secretary of State is on record as saying that the market has a role to play in cutting the use of petrol across the market in the United Kingdom, by what figures does the Department currently estimate that petrol prices will increase over the next few years?

Mr. Moynihan: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are not in a position to predict what oil prices or, through oil prices, petrol prices will be over the next few years. On the hon. Gentleman's first point, there is no doubt that the duty differential in favour of unleaded petrol has been an important catalyst for the increased take-up of unleaded petrol, but the need for further changes to the duty differential is, as the hon. Gentleman knows, a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

Mr. Mans: Although those figures are very encouraging, does my hon. Friend agree that an awful lot of older vehicles could be converted to run on unleaded petrol but that people are ignorant of that fact? Will my hon. Friend therefore consult his colleagues at the Department of Transport to see whether it is possible for notices to be sent with car tax reminders, indicating whether certain vehicles could be easily converted to run on unleaded petrol?

Mr. Moynihan: My hon. Friend makes a very imaginative proposal. I will certainly pass it on to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. My hon. Friend will know that more than 200,000 free information booklets have already been distributed, which answer questions about unleaded fuel and provide contact numbers for the main car manufacturers. Seven out of 10 cars on the road are capable of using unleaded petrol, but we need to press on and go further.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Having admitted that the lower duty on unleaded petrol has helped to promote its use, has the Minister had any discussions with the Treasury about introducing such a lower level of duty for the cleaner diesel fuels which are now available, especially as BP is one of the pioneers in that respect?

Mr. Moynihan: The answer is no—not least because diesel prices are determined by the market. I accept that, at present, they are high—only slightly below unleaded petrol prices—but, as the hon. Gentleman knows, that is because the demand for gas oil, which is equivalent to diesel, is high at this time of year as it is used for heating and high demand tends to push up prices. However, I expect the differential between unleaded and diesel to revert to the norm in the summer months.

Coal Imports

5. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportions of coal consumed in Britain was from *(a)* imports and *(b)* domestic production in 1979 and 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: In 1979, imports accounted for 4 per cent. and domestic production for 96 per cent. of United Kingdom coal consumption. The corresponding figures for 1991 were 17 per cent. for imports and 83 per cent. for domestic production.

Mr. Hain: Since 1979, when the Government came to power, coal imports have increased from 4 million tonnes to 19 millions tonnes, an increase of 346 per cent., which has had the effect of wiping out the coal fields of south Wales, damaging our balance of payments, costing the taxpayer £8,500 for every one of the tens of thousands of unemployed miners, and making us dreadfully dependent on foreign supplies. Does the Secretary of State appreciate that that is economic lunacy of the highest order, or is he just plain thick?

Mr. Wakeham: No. The answer is that expensive electricity is very bad for British industry. The reason why coal imports have been increasing has been the failure of British Coal to be competitive enough. That is not through lack of support by this Government, who have put £17 billion into the coal industry since 1979. I am pleased to say that there are now signs—after the improvement in recent years and with further improvements—that British Coal will be able to secure good contracts for the future.

Mr. Rost: How is British Coal expected to compete in the privatised electricity market when the duopoly is able to close down coal-fired power stations even though they can produce cheaper electricty than the new gas turbine power stations, because the duopoly is able to pass the extra costs to consumers? Should not the regulator ensure that the extra costs for higher cost plant are not passed to consumers? Should not coal-fired power stations, which could be competitive and which the duopoly rejects, be offered for sale so that continuing competition can develop?

Mr. Wakeham: Some of those questions are for the regulator. I remind my hon. Friend that the regional electricity companies have an obligation to undertake economic purchasing. If, as my hon. Friend suggests, there is cheaper electricity to be obtained from coal-fired power stations than from gas-fired power stations, I would expect them to use the electricity from coal-fired stations, in accordance with their licence obligations.

Mr. Eadie: Does the Secretary of State realise that his comments have failed to persuade the House that the policy that he and the Government are operating is right? It is a gross slander on the miners to talk about the cost of coal and about productivity when miners in Britain are achieving record productivity figures. How can the right hon. Gentleman stand at the Dispatch Box and seek to justify the untrammelled entry of coal imports into Britain, which is flinging thousands of miners out of work and at the same time digging a hole for the economic morass in our balance of payments?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's analysis. The threat to coal jobs has been much more from gas than from imported coal. The only way to deal with that is to make coal a competitive source of fuel and the first choice for the generators. It is possible for British Coal to achieve those contracts and that is what I look forward to seeing.

Independent Electricity Generation

6. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the number of new independent electricity generating units since privatisation.

Mr. Wakeham: The Government welcome the strong growth of competition in generation. The first project to be developed since privatisation, at Roosecote, is already supplying electricity to the grid. Four other independent generating stations are under construction and the Government are aware of about 30 other potential independent projects.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my right hon. Friend. I am delighted with the progress that we are making in finding new sources of electricity generation. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should welcome the decision by the European Commission to remove its restriction on gas-fired generating stations? Does he agree that gas is better not only because it is transported through its own pipelines and therefore takes transport off the road, but because it is green-clean and thermally more efficient? In my constituency it has stimulated the introduction of three new generating plants, two of them based at oil terminals at Shell haven, where the oil industry welcomes the progress of moves towards gas and is not mounting a rearguard action against it, as the coal industry seems to be doing.

Mr. Wakeham: I welcome the introduction of gas as a fuel for power generation, but it must remain competitive with coal: that will produce the best prices for electricity consumers.

Mr. Lofthouse: The Secretary of State will undoubtedly be aware that Mr. Malcolm Edwards told the Select Committee on Energy last week that the cost of gas for generation of electricity would be about 2·7p per kilowatt hour compared with 2·2p for coal. That was similar to the evidence that the Secretary of State gave some weeks ago. To enable the House and the country to clear the matter up, will the Secretary of State tell us the correct figure? Will he consider bringing the regulator's review of purchasing policy forward from 1993?

Mr. Wakeham: I have been in the House long enough to know that it is not appropriate for me to comment on evidence given to a Select Committee until that Committee has reported. However, I am prepared to confirm that in

my evidence to the Select Committee I made it clear that the regional electricity companies were obliged to purchase the most economic electricity on the market. If that be coal-fired generation, so much the better.

Mr. Hind: My right hon. Friend will be aware of widespread concern in the community that whatever fuel is chosen by the electricity producers, it should be the cleanest fuel of all. Environmental considerations must play a part. If coal is to be the choice, does my right hon. Friend agree that scrubbers are essential at coal-fired power stations and the type of coal put into them must be low in sulphur dioxide emissions?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Gas is environmentally helpful in achieving the Government's target of stabilising carbon dioxide emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2005. The Opposition policy of seeking to stabilise emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000, while keeping the coal industry at its existing size, stopping the use of gas and phasing out nuclear electricity, is the mathematics of Bedlam—it just does not add up.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Secretary of State name to the House any allegedly independent gas-fired generating projects which do not involve investment from regional electricity companies? For example, is it not true that the Roosecote project has received a substantial amount of capital from NORWEB but that the deal has been kept secret? No one knows how big the contribution was and the price paid for the electricity is being kept secret. Should it not be transparent?

Mr. Wakeham: I believe that contracts between generators and regional electricity companies are commercially confidential, and there is no reason why they should not be——

Mr. Barron: The regulator must know the difference in price.

Mr. Wakeham: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. That information must be available to the regulator, and it is. Secondly, the licensing obligations of regional electricity companies apply to power that they buy from their affiliates as well as to power that they buy from other people.

Energy Efficiency Office

7. **Mr. Gwilym Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what the budget for the Energy Efficiency Office will be in 1992-93; and what was the comparable figure for 1979-80.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The budget for the Energy Efficiency Office in 1992-93 will be £59 million, an increase of 40 per cent. on this year's budget. The comparable figure for expenditure in 1979-80 was £2·4 million.

Mr. Jones: What action is being taken by South Wales Electricity and the other companies on that most important aspect of energy efficiency?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Under the terms of their licences, the newly privatised regional electricity companies must take steps to promote the efficient use of their fuels. In addition, the regulators of both the electricity and gas industries are examining with the industries scope for further funding of energy efficiency measures, funded in part under the price formula. Since privatisation there has been a transformation in the attitude and work of those energy companies towards promoting energy efficiency as well as selling their product.

Dr. Kim Howells: Does the Minister agree that no matter what progress is made in energy efficiency—in Wales or in the west country, for example—it could all come to nothing if the Government press ahead and force British Gas to start up a new company for the transportation of gas through its pipelines? It would mean that British Gas would put a mileage rate on the transportation of gas so that regions such as Wales will suffer from higher gas prices, which will offset anything that we may do to achieve efficiency.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Those are matters for the regulators of the industry concerned, who have an explicit duty to promote competition in the industries and to safeguard the interests of consumers. Before the industries were privatised, there was no comparable safeguard for the consumer. It has come about entirely as a result of privatisation.

Energy Prices

9. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy by how much the level of prices for fuel, light and power has changed in real terms since 1986.

Mr. Moynihan: The cost of fuel, light and power to the domestic sector is estimated to have fallen by 8 per cent. in real terms between 1986 and 1991. For the industrial sector, it is estimated that the cost has fallen by more than 25 per cent. in real terms during the same period.

Mr. Jessel: Is not that a tremendously impressive achievement? It is no wonder that we receive so few complaining letters about electricity prices these days. Can my hon. Friend say how far that is due to privatisation?

Mr. Moynihan: I believe that it is due both to privatisation and to the benefits of restructuring, especially in the electricity industry. It is evident that the emergence of competition in both generation and supply has had a significant impact on prices.

Mr. Tony Banks: Why is it, then, that so many of our constituents are coming to advice surgeries about bills that they cannot afford to pay? Is not it now time that the Minister decided that the standing charges, which are an unacceptable imposition, particularly on the elderly, should be abolished? Why have the Government not done something about that?

Mr. Moynihan: The hon. Gentleman will be able to tell his constituents, as I do mine, that domestic users and other small users of electricity are protected for the first time, as a result of the Government's initiative, by price controls against unjustified price increases.

Mr. Rathbone: Can my hon. Friend say what the price increases are likely to be in the forthcoming year?

Mr. Moynihan: The protection offered by electricity price controls against unjustified increases will limit increases up to April 1992 to the level of inflation as measured from October to October, subject to unforeseen circumstances. It is important that those controls are seen in a three-year context.

Mineworkers (Redundancy Pay)

10. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of British Coal to discuss redundancy payments for mineworkers.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We meet the chairman of British Coal on a regular basis to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Mr. Haynes: I am not surprised that the Minister has not mentioned redundancy payments for miners when they are closing pits willy-nilly. You know, Mr. Speaker, they would complain like billy-o on the Treasury Bench if we docked their redundancy payments. Yet they are using blackmail on miners to vote to close pits earlier than they year that had been decided on so that they can close the pit down and they have cut the redundancy payments for miners. They should be ashamed of themselves. What are they going to do about it?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If I heard the hon. Gentleman correctly, he suggested that redundancy pay for displaced miners was excessively generous. That is a curious message from the Labour party, although it is true that Opposition this year voted against the Coal Industry Bill, which provides for the continuation of those generous payments to redundant miners. Miners all over the country will know that the Labour party voted against those terms.

Mr. Haynes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Due to the unsatisfactory reply from the Minister, I shall apply for an Adjournment debate.

British Coal (Exchequer Subvention)

12. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the total subvention to British Coal from the Exchequer over the past five years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The total amount of Government grant that has been made available to British Coal over the past five financial years is £8·5 billion.

Mr. Marshall Does not that figure underline the Government's commitment to the coal mining industry? Would my hon. Friend care to hazard a guess about how many fewer jobs there would be in that industry if that money had not been given? Does he agree that that money underlines the huge benefits to the taxpayer that will come from the privatisation of the industry, to which the Labour party is opposed?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend is right to point out that, in the past five years and beyond, the taxpayer has not been ungenerous in giving money to the coal industry. In return, we expect the industry to fight for its share of the electricity market by improved productivity. I am delighted at the progress that the industry has made with Government assistance.

Mr. Hardy: The Minister has accepted that investment by the state has assisted miners to achieve records of productivity unmatched by the rest of British industry. However, despite that achievement in the national interest, the Government have sat idly by while the electricity supply industry has disregarded that massive increase in productivity. Not only have the Government disregarded the electricity supply industry's disdain for that achievement, but they have sat idly by and watched collieries close which, in the past five years, have taken up a large part of that sum of money about which the Minister boasted just a moment ago.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The provision of £8·5 billion of grant aid hardly amounts to standing idly by. The mining industry knows that its long-term security comes only from selling its product to customers at prices they can afford. If we insisted on electricity generators buying expensive coal, that would be bad news for domestic electricity customers and it would cause job losses in the rest of British industry.

THORP

13. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy at current trends, how much plutonium he expects the thermal oxide reprocessing plant to have produced by the year 2000.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: BNFL estimates that, by the year 2000, some 30 tonnes of plutonium should have been recovered during reprocessing in THORP.

Mr. Cohen: Is not THORP about to become the principal producer of plutonium for proliferators in the world? Will it not produce the equivalent of about a quarter of the nuclear arsenals of both the Soviet Union and the United States at their peak by the year 2000? Is not THORP capable of destroying the world, and should not the Minister show some courage as well as some sense and phase out plutonium production?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The reprocessing does not create plutonium but recovers it so that it can be recycled as a source of energy. The hon. Gentleman may know that a tonne of plutonium is equivalent, in energy terms, to about 3·5 million tonnes of coal. It therefore makes sense to recover that element for possible future use in civil reactors or, one day, in the fast reactors.

Pit Closures

15. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what recent meetings he has had with the National Union of Mineworkers to discuss the proposed pit closures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: I have had no recent meetings with the National Union of Mineworkers to discuss pit closures.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Minister agree that 90 million tonnes of imported coal last year is equivalent to about 20 pit closures involving 20,000 men? Compared with how the German coal industry is subsidised—its coal is produced at no less than £89 a tonne compared with £42 a tonne for deep-mined coal in Britain—how can we say that the industry is on a level playing field in Europe? What guarantees do we have that some of that imported coal is not part of the German coal laundered in Rotterdam with coal from other countries? Does that mean that we are helping to subsidise the German coal industry while shutting pits in this country and throwing people out of work? Those people then receive the dole, which is taxpayers' money. The whole matter needs to be brought to an end immediately.

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman put his finger on the cause of the problem—the excessive subsidies in

Germany. I want those subsidies to be phased down by the Community, and I also want to encourage British coal to be exported to Germany if that is a way to deal with the problem.

Mr. Roger King: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the widespread confusion among Opposition Members—particularly the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), shown by his attitude towards the importation of coal—and the great conflict within the Labour party about how to handle the matter? Will my right hon. Friend comment on the Labour party's idea on the possibility of stuffing the generating board with political satraps to bring salvation to its energy policy?

Mr. Wakeham: From time to time I read about the views of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, (Mr. Dobson) but I was also interested to read over my cornflakes on Saturday morning the Labour party briefing to the effect that we were not to take the hon. Gentleman too seriously.

Mr. John Evans: Surely the Secretary of State agrees that it is economic madness to switch electricity generation from coal to gas, close scores of collieries and throw thousands of miners on to the dole? Does not the industry need a long-term agreement to keep collieries like Parkside in my constituency, the very last colliery in north-west England, in existence?

Mr. Wakeham: We need the lowest possible electricity prices for consumers and British Coal has a part to play in that. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it would be in Britain's best interests to have long-term coal contracts, but those must be negotiated on commercial terms.

Energy Efficiency Office

16. **Sir John Hannam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what the budget for the Energy Efficiency Office will be in 1992-93; and what was the comparable figure for 1979-80.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones).

Sir John Hannam: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that this year more than £1 billion is being spent by the public sector on energy efficiency? Much energy could also be saved by businesses. Has he any new initiatives in the pipeline for energy efficiency in the business sector?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I can confirm the figure given by my hon. Friend. The funding of the Energy Efficiency Office in my Department has risen 10 times since the Government took office in 1979. The energy management assistance scheme, which will come into place on 1 April, will grant-aid energy efficiency projects for smaller businesses—a new initiative to add to the many others that my Department already runs.

Energy Management

17. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will outline what initiatives he is taking to encourage responsible energy management among businesses.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We are taking forward three major initiatives: the making a corporate commitment campaign, which is designed to secure board level commitment to energy efficiency; best practice, which is the Department's main programme of energy efficiency information transfer; and the energy management assistance scheme, which I have mentioned and which gives grant aid to the energy efficiency projects of smaller businesses.

Mr. Evennett: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, which makes most welcome news. What was the budget for 1979-80 and what is the predicted budget for 1992? Do not the figures show that the Government are committed to the scheme?

Mr Heathcoat-Amory: In real terms, the funding for the Energy Efficiency Office has risen 10 times during the past 11 years.

THE ARTS

Arts Sponsorship

28. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he has any plans to visit Barnet to discuss the private sponsorship of the arts.

The Minister for The Arts (Mr. Tim Renton): I will be visiting Community and Recreational Arts in Barnet in March, where I will have the pleasure of attending the official opening of the Tedder lounge, which has been extended to include a wheelchair accessible art room. I shall be happy to speak about private sponsorship of the arts if asked.

Mr. Marshall: If asked, would my right hon. Friend be able to confirm that private sponsorship of the arts has generated an additional £46 million on top of the already large amounts of public expenditure? Would he also be able to confirm that the only threat to the continuation of that expenditure is the election of philistines of the left, who are opposed to the scheme and whose tax policies would pulverise the attempts of those who support the arts?

Mr. Renton: I agree with my hon. Friend. One of the very satisfying factors is that despite the difficult times that some companies are facing, they are continuing with their sponsorship of the arts, often in partnership with my office, through the business sponsorship incentive scheme award. It is sad that the Labour party has already shown indifference to that form of arts funding. If it does not kill off the golden goose, it will certainly let it starve to death through neglect.

Museum Charges

29. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what recent assessment has been made of the effect on attendance figures of the introduction of admission charges to museums.

Mr. Renton: Comparisons are hard to make because of the unreliability of the numbers recorded prior to the introduction of charges. However, evidence suggests that,

after an initial fall-off, admission numbers at those museums which charge have held up well in subsequent years.

Mr. Flynn: Since the catastrophic drop in attendance at the National Museum of Wales—a reduction which has largely been made up by the efforts of the museum staff—there is still bitter resentment among Welsh people that a barrier prevents them from seeing the treasures of Wales that were purchased and the national museum that was established as an expression of Welsh identity. Those shows of identity were paid for by the pennies of miners and the barrier was imposed by the philistine, alien Government who do not know the difference between a work of art and a tin of baked beans. When will there be an end to the philistine approach of the Government who apply a cornershop philosophy to the arts?

Mr. Renton: It is extraordinary to describe the Government or Welsh Office as philistine when the Government are currently spending £21 million on the extension and development of the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff. I had great pleasure in seeing that extension and I would be surprised if the hon. Gentleman had not visited it and was not looking forward to its opening. The fall in attendance was mentioned in the debate on the Museums and Galleries Bill the other day. Although a fall in numbers occurred in the first year after charges were introduced, that was largely due to the building works, but the figures have increased and Welsh men are looking forward enormously to the addition to their national museum.

Mr. Soames: Does my right hon. Friend accept that if the major galleries of this country are to go on with their extremely enlightened and successful purchasing programme, it is essential that we bring in charging for entry? Does he accept that the general public will not mind in the least paying to see these magnificent treasures? Will he further accept that there is a perfectly satisfactory formula under which all who are exempted from prescription charges are exempted from charges for entry to museums?

Mr. Renton: My hon. Friend will know that the galleries and museums that charge either do not charge or operate substantial concessions for the elderly, for school children and for educational parties. My hon. Friend puts his finger on a crucial point: the total income of the museums and galleries for which I am responsible, outside their grant in aid, is £48 million—up by £20 million from the figures for three years ago. If Labour came to power, it would remove all that money and thus deprive the public of the pleasure of the special exhibitions that are staged as a result of the charging policy.

Municipal Theatres

30. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement of the funding of municipal theatres.

Mr. Renton: Municipal theatres, which are an essential part of arts provision in this country, are funded and run by local authorities. As receiving theatres they do not attract direct Arts Council funding, but they benefit from the Arts Council's support for touring which enables more distinctive and varied programmes to be mounted.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank the Minister for that reply. Does he agree that it is possible, if arts societies stage productions that the population want to see or hear, for those societies to be self-financing—as the society in Billericay is? The arts society there produces an excellent range of cinema, theatre and music, professional and amateur, and last year made a profit of £30,000. By contrast, in nearby Basildon, whose council levies an extortionate community charge, the municipal theatre receives a subsidy of £1·7 million a year and makes a loss of £500,000, which has to be funded out of the pockets of my constituents?

Mr. Renton: I hesitate to enter a dispute about the rival merits of these two different establishments. I certainly appreciate the good work done by the establishment in my hon. Friend's constituency which she mentioned first; but I would point out that the Towngate theatre in Basildon also puts on some interesting performances—by Opera 80 and the Second Stride dance company, for instance. I understand that it recently hosted a show by the Chippendales, not a branch of the "Antiques Roadshow" but an American male strip show which played to an all-female audience. That at least shows a certain equality of opportunity.

Mr. Fisher: Will the Minister widen his reply to include funding of the national companies, and in particular will he explain the remarks that he made to the Royal Society of Arts last week, when he speculated on the Government funding the national companies directly? Is that ending of the arm's-length principle Government policy or is it another example of a Minister, who knows that he has only another five weeks in the job, making a remark entirely of his own without consulting his civil servants, the Arts Council or any of the national companies? Will he make his position clear: are the Government going to end their arm's-length approach?

Mr. Renton: That question is a long way from municipal theatres. However, if the hon. Gentleman had attended the seminar at which I made my remarks last Monday—I greatly regret that he was not there to hear me talk about delegation to the regional arts boards—he would have known that I made the point that if such delegation is fully successful—if the regional arts boards are progressing well—the question whether the five major national companies should continue to be funded by the Arts Council or be funded directly will arise. I framed my remarks in a hypothetical context following on from delegation to the regional arts boards, and I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman was not there to listen and to learn.

Touring Companies

31. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what steps he is taking to encourage the increase of touring by arts companies.

Mr. Renton: Following the record increase in Government funding of the Arts Council for 1992-93, I am delighted that the council has decided to increase its touring budget for England for next year by over 19 per cent. to £9·6 million, and to increase substantially the separate Great Britain touring fund.

Mr. Amos: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the quality of cultural life in the north-east is second to none?

Will he join me in congratulating Queen's hall in Hexham on winning so many national awards? Will he give an assurance that he will sustain the generous funding of Northern Arts that he has managed in the past few years?

Mr. Renton: I am well aware of the good work carried out by the Queen's hall arts centre. Its public sector funding depends on money from Northern Arts, and I am delighted to confirm that, as a result of the record settlement that I was able to negotiate for overheads, Northern Arts will receive a 13·9 per cent increase for 1992-93 amounting to more than £5 million.

European Arts Festival

33. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what plans he has for the European arts festival; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: To ask the Minister for the Arts, what plans he has for the European arts festival;— *[Interruption.]*

The European arts festival, which I announced on 9 December will be a rewarding and imaginative way of celebrating our Presidency of the European Community in the second half of the year. Some £6 million is being made available to support a full programme of events across the United Kingdom.

Mr. Greenway: I thank my right hon. Friend for that doubly impressive answer. Will there be something for everybody, for people of all ages, in the European arts festival? Would not the festival be a good way to allow our citizens to improve their knowledge and understanding of European languages and culture?

Mr. Renton: Yes. I was so carried away by the wisdom of my hon. Friend's question that I found it necessary to repeat it.

It is hoped that the European arts festival will reach all parts of the community, schoolchildren included, and will bring a tradition of British art in the European context to all parts of the country, including Ealing, North.

CIVIL SERVICE

Executive Agencies

38. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met representatives of the civil service unions to discuss the operation of executive agencies.

The Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Mr. Tim Renton): I meet representatives of the civil service unions from time to time to discuss a range of issues. Union members have an important part to play in the continued success of "next steps".

Mr. Evans: Did the Minister discuss with the unions concerned the maintenance of free collective bargaining and union recognition in the agencies? Will he take this opportunity to give a categorical assurance that none of the agencies will be allowed or encouraged to derecognise any of the civil service trade unions?

Mr. Renton: Derecognition of the civil service unions is certainly not part of our policy. In the context of the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I must ask him to appreciate that one of the important matters now being examined by the chief executives of the agencies is the issue of greater pay flexibility and performance pay, so that better results can be achieved, both by individuals and in terms of customer service, from a given amount of pay. That matter was being discussed at the chief executives' conference that I attended in Harrogate on Thursday, and it is a matter of great importance to all those working in the "next steps" agencies.

Mr. Latham: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, since these bodies remain within the civil service, some of us feel that executive agencies are neither fish nor fowl nor good red herring? Will he see what can be done to improve parliamentary accountability for the agencies because, in particular since they are responsible to the Public Accounts Committee, Ministers should be prepared to answer questions about them?

Mr. Renton: I disagree with my hon. Friend about the agencies being neither fish nor fowl nor good red herring. They are an extremely important development for the civil service and for those parts of the civil service that are especially concerned with delivering service to the customer. If my hon. Friend has a chance to visit any of the executive agencies, as I do, he will be very impressed by the way that they are tackling their tasks. My hon. Friend asked about answers to parliamentary questions. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has submitted proposals in that connection which I think are being studied by the appropriate House of Commons Committee.

Dr. Marek: The Minister will know that for some years London weighting has been frozen because the Minister's policy is to pay just sufficient to recruit and retain civil servants. Does he intend that policy to be part of the new executive agencies?

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman is wrong, and I think that he knows it. Although further London spine points have been introduced and the amount of extra pay given to people working in London has therefore increased, there is more flexibility in the system than there used to be. Now, the emphasis is on pay agreements that will meet the specific needs of the civil service and of the executive agencies throughout the country, rather than on maintaining an unnecessarily rigid or uniform structure —a structure which did not necessarily produce the best results in the past.

Civil Service College

39. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will make a progress report on the Civil Service college.

Mr. Renton: The college is contributing to a better-trained and more professional civil service. It has recently published its prospectus for 1992-93, and I will send my hon. Friend a copy.

Mr. Dunn: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that one of the tasks of the Civil Service college is to inculcate a sense of responsibility, a sense of loyalty and a sense of commitment to the Government of the day? Will he urge those who run the college to use the example of Mr. Pashley to illustrate the way in which a civil servant ought not to behave? I refer to

trading in stolen documents with the Labour party—a practice that has not, I believe, yet been condemned by that party.

Mr. Renton: I appreciate the sentiment that lies behind my hon. Friend's question. The work of the civil service is, of course, dedicated more to the training of senior management and training in the key professional skills such as information technology, audit, purchasing and supply. As for the basic question of loyalty to which my hon. Friend referred, that consideration should be fundamental to the acceptance of a civil service job, and I hope that it will always remain a priority for every civil servant, regardless of which party is in power.

Mr. Winnick: When the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was Prime Minister, Mr. Bernard Ingham and Mr. Charles Powell exercised far more influence on members of the Cabinet, apart from on the Prime Minister herself. Would it be possible for the Civil Service college to illustrate, by means of that example, what should not happen, and to demonstrate the amount of abuse that took place at that point in our history? Would not that be useful?

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman does his best to get everything out of context whenever that is possible. His hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Banks) is one of those Members of Parliament who have contributed regularly to college courses, and I am delighted that he has done so. Perhaps he would like to put his hon. Friend right in regard to the question of bias at the college.

Sir John Stokes: I admire the work of the Civil Service college. Does its principal keep in touch with the colleges in Her Majesty's forces, which maintain such a high standard in every respect, while also ensuring that intelligence is applied to complex problems?

Mr. Renton: I know the principal well. She is a woman —and I am very pleased that she is one of the women heading the executive agencies. I am sure that she follows up precisely the kind of matter to which my hon. and loyal Friend has referred, but I shall make certain that that is so, and write to my hon. Friend.

Appointments

40. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how many senior civil service appointments subject to prime ministerial approval have been made since 1979.

Mr. Renton: There are currently about 170 posts in grades 1 and 2 of the civil service. All appointments in these top grades have been subject to the consent of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Banks: Does the Prime Minister see some dangers there? Maintaining the previous Prime Minister's attitude to the selection of senior civil servants—"Is he one of ours?"—will lead to the politicisation of the civil service at the top level, and I believe that that has happened. Would it not be better either to move over to a "spoils" system —which would at least do away with all the hypocrisy, and would be more honest and open—or to appoint civil servants via a Select Committee, or through some other all-party approach?

Mr. Renton: Those comments are unworthy of the hon. Gentleman. I am glad to say that his thoughts are not shared by Opposition Front Benchers. I can only assume that it was from his previous experience as chairman of the Greater London council in 1985-86 that he learnt all about "getting your friends appointed to the key jobs", and that that is why he assumes that the same is happening in the civil service now. It is not; the top people are appointed solely on the basis of their merit and intelligence.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is sad to hear the ex-leader of the Greater London council, who appointed people purely on political merit, suggest that senior civil servants are chosen on anything other than ability? Would it not be a sad day for this country if that attitude of mind took hold? We are well served by our civil servants. Although Governments come and go, governance in the civil service sector of this country continues untainted.

Mr. Renton: I agree with my hon. Friend. The civil service procedures for the most senior appointments are well established. They have been supported by both sides of the House for many years. They are based on ability to do the job. I do not believe that we should cast aside at all lightly the all-party support for these methods.

Staff Development

41. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what opportunities exist for civil servants based in Great Britain to gain experience in duties relating to Northern Ireland as part of staff development programmes.

Mr. Renton: Staff are regularly seconded to the Northern Ireland Office from other Departments and agencies. In addition, several Departments offer postings to their offices in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Dalyell: May I welcome the presence of the Home Secretary and the shadow Home Secretary when asking a question of which I have given notice, in the hope of a serious reply? What is the House of Commons to make of the reports of serious on-going disagreements between, on the one hand, Mr. Ian Burns and other most senior officials in the Home Office and the Metropolitan police, as represented by Mr. Bill Taylor, and, on the other side of this subject of how to deal with Ireland-originating situations, Mrs. Stella Rimington whom the Government, with a fanfare of trumpets, announced as the head of MI5? Does the Minister agree that answering as he does, in a sense, for the Prime Minister, this is a very serious matter for the House of Commons?

Mr. Renton: I know that the hon. Gentleman tabled an early-day motion on the subject a short time ago. However, he well realises that these matters of detail are for response by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. If he catches your eye, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Gentleman may have an opportunity to raise the matter in the debate that is to take place later this afternoon.

BCCI

3.30 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the need for urgent action by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry following the settlement proposals for BCCI."

The matter is specific because, as the House knows, the liquidators of BCCI and the representatives of the Sheik of Abu Dhabi last Friday published, at long last, their settlement proposals. The proposals have as their cornerstone a very substantial payment of between $1·7 billion and $2·2 billion by the Sheik of Abu Dhabi. I pay tribute to the generosity and assistance of the sheik in seeking to support the innocent depositors of BCCI. The Government of Abu Dhabi have retained their dignity. Even the advertisement in *The Daily Telegraph* today is in measured tones. I welcome the proposals, but they are complicated. There is much detail and depositors may have to waive some of their rights.

The matter is important because on 14 January 1992 the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, in a 13-minute exchange of faxes, appointed four liquidators on the undertaking that they would hold a creditors' meeting within a certain time. Twenty weeks after the closure of the bank, the creditors have still not been consulted. As was demonstrated last Friday, the liquidators—the £1 million a week men—appear to be out of control. They were more interested in briefing the press than in telling the creditors' association and the staff committee about the proposed deal.

The matter is urgent, because I understand that the liquidators are proposing to go to court imminently to seek to be relieved of their undertaking to hold a creditors' meeting on the ground that such a meeting would be too difficult to arrange. The vast majority of creditors have not been consulted about the proposal. It is perfectly possible, in my view, should they not want to call a meeting, that, via a satellite link-up around the globe in five or six world centres, depositors and creditors could talk to and listen to the liquidators. I understand that this would cost less than a mass meeting in London, which is estimated to cost £750,000.

The creditors must be allowed to discuss the settlement and ask questions of the liquidators. They need to know when the first payments can be made. Local authorities, and others, need the money now. We need to know why proof of debt forms have still not been sent out by the liquidators and, thus, why no money has been paid under the statutory scheme.

Under the liquidators' proposals they will merely be sent a form for depositors to state whether they approve of the deal. They will not know exactly who they are not going to be allowed to sue. That is not good enough. During the negotiations there was a need for secrecy but no longer. We need a full debate in the House to allow the Secretary of State to set out what proposals he has to deal with this unsatisfactory state of affairs.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely

"the need for urgent action by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry following the settlement proposals for BCCI."

As the House knows, under Standing Order No. 20, I have to announce my decision without giving my reasons to the House. I have listened with care to what the hon. Gentleman has said about the matter, but I regret that his application does not meet the criteria of the Standing Order and I cannot therefore submit his application to the House.

Points of Order

3.36 pm

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I seek your advice? You will recall that on 27 January I asked the Secretary of State a question about the disabled in the coal mining industry. He ignored and disbelieved the figures which I quoted but which I had obtained from a Government agency. He stated that he would write to me, but he has not done so. If Ministers make misleading statements from the Dispatch Box, what recourse does a Back Bencher have?

Mr. Speaker: I understand that there has been a misunderstanding, but we must not have another debate on the subject now.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. John Wakeham): When the hon. Gentleman asked his question earlier this afternoon, I had no idea to what he was referring. I have since checked the *Hansard* report of the previous Energy questions, and I am pleased to tell the hon. Gentleman that the information that he requires will be sent to him today. There was some delay in my Department in getting the information, and I apologise to him for that.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you will have noticed from today's *Financial Times*, the Army is to shed 3,500 service personnel. As you know, this causes many problems with regard to affordable housing and relocation of those who are being discharged. I understand that the Secretary of State is to give a press conference at 3.30 pm. I wonder whether you, Mr. Speaker, can use your good offices to bring the subject before the House so that we can debate it.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that I hold that press conferences—if given—should preferably be given on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will know that points of order were raised on Friday when a Conservative Member objected to the Shops (Amendment) Bill under which there would be a White Paper and a detailed Bill to overcome the Government's intolerable laziness in condoning law breaking on this subject. We called for the Government to find time to consider the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell)——

Mr. Speaker: Order. What is the point of order for me? There was an exchange about this on Friday which went on for a long time and which, in my judgment, was somewhat out of order.

Mr. Michael: The point of order for you, Sir, is whether you can guide us. Having had a vote of 222 to 4 in favour of the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend, how can Ministers be dragged into allowing us to debate and vote on the issue?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that I do not give procedural advice on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether you can advise me. At the weekend a group of constituents came to see me because they were incensed by a statement made by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department which implied that the West Yorkshire police were incompetent. How can I raise this matter and get the Secretary of State or someone else to apologise for the disgraceful slur on the West Yorkshire police, who are gallant and efficient gentlemen?

Mr. Speaker: I am sure they are. The hon. Gentleman has not been here as long as some other hon. Members have. I can give him advice on such matters of procedure privately, if he comes to see me one evening after 10 pm.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you advise me? It is obvious that the Government have not made a request to you today to make a statement on the meeting of Environment Ministers and European and United States leaders in Estoril at the weekend on the important issue of banning chlorofluorocarbons and protecting the ozone layer. I understand that today the Department of the Environment is either issuing a press release or holding a press conference on the issue. Has the Department requested to make a statement, if not today at least tomorrow, on that important issue?

Mr. Speaker: It is an important issue. I have had no request today for a statement.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would it be possible to refer to the death in the Netherlands of Mrs. Kate ter Horst? She was a very brave person during the battle for Arnhem in September 1944. Would you consider writing a letter—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may not be interested. At the cost of her life, in September 1944 she allowed her home to be used by British troops.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should table an early-day motion on the matter, which would achieve wide support from hon. Members of all parties. It is not really a matter for me.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. At the weekend, there was a report that an employee in the private office of the Secretary of State for Employment was phoning industrialists touting for quotes to be used against Labour. It is clearly a deplorable practice to use ministerial telephones in such a way.

Mr. Speaker: If that is true, it is not a matter for me. I am not a member of the Government, and I do not know who is telephoned at weekends. I can say that I was not telephoned at the weekend.

Mr. Cohen: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The quotes were to be used by a Minister in the House. Is that not tantamount to misleading the House? Is that not an appalling practice and a matter for you—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I tried to catch your eye at Question Time because of a matter which has been drawn to my attention and which seems to be extremely serious. I understand that in at least one of the executive agencies, the Benefits Agency, staff are about to be required to wear uniforms. Can the House directly challenge or approve such a development in an agency? There may be serious

[Mr. Peter Hardy]

implications. If such a practice is established in an agency, it may be only a matter of time before staff in Government Departments have to wear uniform. Shall we see shoulder flashes bearing the name of the Department concerned? Would you approve of such a development, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: There is an old Chinese proverb—"In vain is the net laid in front of the bird."

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact that you are in the tricky position of not being able to communicate with the two political parties, or with any of the other Rag, Tag and Bobtails, and in view of the fact that you have to live a relatively lonely life, may I ask whether you have been tipped off about the election? The Press Gallery is abuzz. There have been leaks from Ministers—not from civil servants—that the whole thing is fixed for a Cabinet meeting on the Thursday following the Budget, for an announcement to be made that day, for the Finance Bill to be wound up in two days and for this Parliament to come to an end on 16 March. Everything has been sorted out by the Government. Have you been tipped off? We have to pick up the information from the press. If the press knows, it is high time that the Government had the guts to tell us the information from the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman knows, my intelligence is good, and I have been tipped off that there is to be an election in the near future.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): On a genuine point of order concerning the protection of Back Benchers, Mr. Speaker. No doubt you, Sir, will be aware that the Table Office is refusing to accept hon. Members' questions referring to health authority matters in the regions. I accept that, up to a point, there are good reasons for that. I also accept the advice of the Table Clerks that I should write to the chairmen of regional health authorities and that I have now done. But surely Ministers responsible for divulging to Back Benchers information on the health service should be aware that delays are being built in at source—in the regional health authority areas—and that hon. Members are not being given the information about the health service that they seek on behalf of their constituents.

I suspect that this is another of those conspiracies whereby those on the Treasury Bench are trying to suppress bad news in the run-up to the general election. Should not you, Sir, protect Back Benchers' interests in this matter?

Mr. Speaker: I have not had the matter brought to my attention, but I will look into it.

Mr. Winnick: Further to my earlier point of order, Mr. Speaker. On reflection, I should perhaps have raised the matter on another day, and I take your point about tabling an early-day motion. I think that there will be general agreement in the House that Kate ter Horst was an exceptionally brave person who gave aid to dying and wounded soldiers. The purpose of my point of order, Sir, was simply to ask whether it would be possible for you to write to her husband, who was also injured in the road accident, to express our sympathy and to let him know that we have not forgotten what his wife did in 1944.

Mr. Speaker: I could do that only with the permission of the House, but as Arnhem is linked with my own borough of Croydon, I would certainly consider writing a private letter on this matter.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Further to the important point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), Mr. Speaker. I fully understand and accept that you will not have been told by the Government the date of the general election, but I am sure that you will agree that the traditional right of hon. Members in connection with what is probably the most important day in the parliamentary year—Budget day—to have a full four-day debate on the Budget is extremely important. Can you confirm that, if any attempt were made by the Executive to curtail debate on the Budget to fewer than four days—a four-day debate would be in accordance with the precedent established as far back as any hon. Member can remember—it would be a serious infringement of hon. Members' democratic rights?

Mr. Speaker: That is an absolutely hypothetical question because there are other dates mentioned.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will have to take it by way of balance.

Mr. Bottomley: If we are regularly to be faced—as we have been this afternoon—with a succession of points of order exclusively from Labour Members attempting to continue until as to near 4 o'clock as they can, would it be possible for the Labour Chief Whip to organise a raffle so that only one or two of them can raise points of order while the rest of us get on with the business for which we are here?

Mr. Speaker: I think that we should get on. The trouble is that, as the House knows, if we do not have a private notice question or statement to take us to 3.50 pm, when the television cameras go off, we tend to have points of order instead.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Registration (Land and Deeds) (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

Question agreed to.

Terrorism

3.48 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I beg to move,

That the draft Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order 1992 be approved.

It is clear from the recent exchanges that some Opposition Members are keen to have a general election. It is equally clear that they are not keen to debate the order because they are highly embarrassed about the line that they are going to be invited to take later by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley).

The prevention of terrorism Act is an exceptional measure. It is justified only by the wholly exceptional threat that this country faces from terrorism. It is absolutely right that each year Parliament should consider whether the Act need continue in force. Today I am once again asking the House to approve the Act's continuance in force because it remains an essential part of our defences against terrorism.

Those defences cannot be lowered while the terrorist threat remains high. Let us be quite clear from the beginning of this afternoon's debate exactly what that threat has led to. There was no let-up in the terrorist campaign last year. In Northern Ireland, 94 people were slaughtered and more than 900 were injured as a result of republican and loyalist terrorism. Last year I reported that in 1990 there had been more terrorist incidents on mainland Great Britain than at any time since 1975. I regret that I have to report the same again this year.

In 1991 terrorists struck on the mainland at a variety of targets—military, political and economic—and used a variety of means. Three people died, including two terrorists, and 39 were injured. The House will recall some of those incidents: the explosion at Victoria station last February in which one man died and several children were injured; the mortar bomb attack on Downing street in the same month; and the large number of incendiary devices that were planted in shops and on trains.

So we should be under no doubt today about what it is that we face. It is a ruthless campaign of murder and destruction here on the mainland and in Northern Ireland. It is a campaign which is conducted regardless of the risk to innocent people. It is a campaign conducted by terrorists fanatically committed to their own misguided causes.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Baker: I will give way in a moment.

In the debate last year, the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook said that

"The Act creates the illusion of a campaign against terrorism."—[*Official Report*, 4 March 1991; Vol. 187, c. 32.]

I put it to the House that the Government's campaign is a very real one and that the powers of the Act form an essential part of it. The House will recall the recent incident in Coalisland where four men, including Kevin Barry O'Donnell, died. Here was a man stopped in north London with Kalashnikovs in the boot of the car he was driving. He was acquitted of possession of firearms with intent to endanger life, but I was satisfied that he had been involved in terrorism and that here was a very dangerous man from whom people needed to be protected. So I exercised my power to exclude him from Great Britain. Following his expulsion and his recent death, the IRA boasted that O'Donnell had been a member of its terrorist organisation since 1988 and had been active in operations against military targets throughout Britain. I have no doubt that my decision to exclude him was the right one, but without this Act I could not have done so.

Our response to the terrorist campaign is not, of course, confined to this Act. It is much more than that. At the front line here in Great Britain are the police who are pitting themselves—often at great personal risk—against the terrorists. The House will not expect me to go into details about what this effort involves. Suffice it to say that very substantial resources of manpower and equipment are needed and I will ensure that the police get the resources, the manpower and the equipment that are required. I have seen calls for an agency to fight terrorism, but I want to make it absolutely clear that we have an effective national organisation. I can assure the House that the central co-ordination of anti-terrorist activity across the country, on the whole, has been achieved. The House will no doubt recall the arrangements for this which I announced last year.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): All hon. Members are appalled by the continued slaughter in Northern Ireland and the way in which people have been murdered. I will not dignify the murderers by using the term paramilitaries: they are out-and-out terrorists whether they are members of the Provisional IRA or killers on the other side.

What purpose is served by the smear stories over the weekend—whether or not the Home Secretary is in any way responsible for them—which seem to suggest, and more so in this immediate pre-election period, that Labour is soft on terrorism? Is it not useful for the House and the country that we are united against terrorism and we condemn it at every opportunity? If we have differences—obviously there are differences—over this measure, what purpose is served, except to give aid and comfort to the terrorist, to pretend that the Opposition are soft on terrorism?

Mr. Baker: I shall refer to that matter later, but there was national consensus on terrorism and on the Act until 1983. The Act was put on the statute book by a Labour Government and it was operated by Labour Ministers who sat in the same Cabinet as the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook. That was the national consensus that existed. That is what I am asking the House to restore tonight—a national consensus. National consensus can be restored only by the Opposition voting for the order.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Home Secretary address the question which I think that he heard me put to his colleague, the Minister for the Civil Service? What is the House of Commons to make, in relation to counter-terrorism activities on the mainland—we cannot know the full truth of the matter—of what purports to be a row between Mr. Ian Burns and other senior officials in the Department, supported by Mr. Bill Taylor and senior officials of the Metropolitan police, against attempts by Mrs. Stella Rimington to enlarge the role of MI5 in that situation? Does not that raise very serious questions for civil liberties in this country?

Mr. Baker: There is no row at all. I do not propose to depart from the long-standing practice of Governments of both parties not to comment on operational matters relating to the security service, but I am quite certain that Mrs. Rimington is the best person for the job, and she has my complete confidence in the charge of the Security Service. Naturally, we are continuing to ensure that the arrangements for countering the terrorist threat are as effective as possible. That is what the Government have always done and that is what we will continue to do.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Home Secretary said that he thought that Mrs. Stella Rimington was the best person for the job. Will he make it clear whether he meant the best person for the job as head of the Security Service or the best person for the job, in answer to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), in taking over counter-terrorism?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member must not raise a point of order and then put a question to the Home Secretary; that is not fair.

Mr. Baker: I expressed my confidence in Mrs. Rimington as the head of the security services.

No one can delude himself into believing that we will always succeed in catching all the terrorists—that will never be possible—but I do know that the effort is substantial, is sustained and is highly professional, and I invite the House to join me in thanking and congratulating all those engaged in it. Could I remind the House of some of their successes? Recent arrests have disrupted terrorist activities on the mainland and resulted in charges and the recovery of bomb-making equipment and weapons. The courage and vigilance of a police officer led to the discovery of bomb-making equipment in a garage in north London. Just recently, a bomb was successfully defused just 100 yds from this Chamber, in Parliament street. Photos and videos of wanted terrorists have been issued.

Another part of our campaign is the ban on direct broadcasts of representatives of proscribed organisations or those speaking in support of such organisations. I appreciate that that is not part of the order, but it is one of the weapons that we use to deal with terrorism. The Labour party is pledged to lifting that ban. It is a highly irresponsible policy. Such broadcasts can be deeply offensive to viewers and listeners, especially for those who are related to the victims of violence. Furthermore, terrorists and their supporters have in the past taken advantage of those appearances to deliver indirect threats to the public. Apologists for murder should not be given a platform to air their defence of evil.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baker: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Let me now refer to the prevention of terrorism Act itself. That provides essential powers to counter the terrorist threat. Without those powers, the police would be severely hampered in doing their job. In urging the House to support me in seeking the continuance of the Act for another year, I am pleased to have the backing of Lord Colville of Culross, who carried out the independent review of the operation of the Act during 1991. I take this opportunity to express thanks, on behalf if the House, to Lord Colville for his report.

I should like to remind the House of the powers of the Act, why we need them and why it is absolute nonsense to say that they create an

"illusion of a campaign against terrorism."

The first power is the power to proscribe in Great Britain organisations that are concerned in terrorism or with promoting or encouraging terrorism connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland. At present the IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army are proscribed. Without the Act, those organisations would be free to meet openly in Britain, recruit new members and raise funds as openly as other political parties. They could hold rallies and march through our streets. I believe that would be unacceptable, as I hope the House will agree.

In the past Opposition Members have expressed their doubts about the power of exclusion.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): Before the Home Secretary leaves that part of the Bill, does he recall that a year ago we on the Opposition Benches said that we would gladly welcome the extension of the tougher measures laid down in the emergency provisions Act to England and Wales? Tougher measures would make it more difficult to raise funds for terrorist causes. Has the Home Secretary yet thought about whether he will accept the Opposition's suggestion that we should be tougher?

Mr. Baker: In view of the hon. Gentleman's question. I shall deal with terrorist finances now. The Government were the first in the world to introduce legislative measures against terrorist finances. Those measures have given the police an additional and invaluable investigative tool, which has enabled them to obtain information on not only the funds but the movements and activities of terrorists. Lord Colville repeated his criticisms of the Act in this year's review, but I believe that the existing provisions are broadly right. We have reviewed them carefully during the past year. We have examined the provisions of the 1989 Act, as we undertook to do, and we have identified some improvements. Those improvements now have the approval of the Association of Chief Police Officers and we shall introduce them at an early opportunity.

Mr. Hattersley: Could I have a straight answer to the simplest of questions? I reminded the Home Secretary that a year ago we asked for the tougher powers that already existed in Northern Ireland legislation to deal with funds that go to terrorist organisations. Is he prepared to move forward to tougher powers or is he not?

Mr. Baker: The right hon. Gentleman cannot have listened to what I said or to the reply that I gave a year ago. I dealt with the powers of the emergency provisions Act last year. They have been operating for only a short time in Northern Ireland. We are reviewing them. We think it unlikely that those powers will operate effectively in the United Kingdom. However, we have some improvements and we shall introduce them. I hope that I shall have the support of the right hon. Gentleman in that. We shall also introduce changes in the general legislation on money laundering and drug trafficking, because the interaction with that legislation is also important. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that this year we have already found that those powers prove effective. As I said, I am broadly content with their operation at present.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Perhaps I did not hear the Home Secretary aright. I understood him to say a moment ago that the additional powers in the emergency provisions Act to deal with terrorist finances were "unlikely to operate effectively in the United Kingdom". Does he wish to reconsider what he said? Was he saying that the powers in the Act are unlikely to operate effectively in Northern Ireland? If so, why are they there and why is not he considering amending them?

Mr. Baker: I meant Great Britain—on the mainland, as it were. The powers are operating effectively in Northern Ireland in rather different circumstances.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): On the important point about the seizure of assets, will my right hon. Friend agree that the issue is more complicated than it seems if one considers it only from the fairly narrow straitjacket of the prevention of terrorism Acts in England and Wales? Does he agree that a wider extension of criminal justice legislation in England and Wales is necessary to enable the proceeds of serious crime to be seized, whatever the cause of the crime? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the difficulty is distinguishing between a supposedly terrorist activity and a straightforward criminal activity and understanding the intermesh between the two?

Mr. Baker: That is the very point that I made a moment ago. There is an interaction between the existing legislation on money laundering and drug trafficking and the prevention of terrorism Acts. We have identified certain improvements in the provisions of the prevention of terrorism Act and we have also identified changes which we want in the general legislation. Both will be introduced immediately after the general election.

On the power of exclusion—the point at which the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook interrupted me—the Act permits a person to be excluded from all or part of the United Kingdom. The purpose is to limit the areas where terrorists may carry out their activities. As I said last year, ideally it will be possible to charge such people and to bring them before the courts. In practice, however, that cannot always be done, as our information comes from sources that we cannot disclose without risking people's lives. The power of exclusion is a valuable one in limiting terrorists' spheres of operation. To remove it would be to remove an important part of our ability to protect the public, as I have illustrated in citing the example of O'Donnell.

I want to make it clear that decisions to exclude are not made lightly—I deal with each one—and the person excluded also has the right to make representations to an independent adviser. Lord Colville in his review of the Act reports that he cannot find anything to criticise in the way that decisions were reached. He further notes that the exercise of the power has been modest in 1991 and that the balance imparted by the advisers has shown its worth.

Now I come to the powers of arrest, examination and detention. The Act empowers the police to examine people at ports and airports to determine whether they may be involved in terrorism; to arrest and detain on reasonable suspicion of involvement in terrorism; and to detain without charge for an initial period of 48 hours and for a further period of a maximum of five days on the authority of the Secretary of State. All those cases are referred to me. None of those powers would exist but for the Act.

Judging by past performance, we will shortly hear from Labour Members that those powers are oppressive and unnecessary. I do not agree. Successive Home Secretaries since 1974 have not agreed. Only certain Opposition Members—including, I regret to say, the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook—now hold to that view. Those who do so simply misunderstand the Act. They fail to grasp the nature of terrorism and fail therefore to see what needs to be done.

Terrorism is an insidious threat. Terrorists have a ruthless commitment to their cause and a total disregard for the lives or safety of innocent people. We are dealing with fanatics who stop at nothing. We must respond to them with appropriate measures if we are to fulfil our obligations to the people of this country, who are entitled to be protected from men and women of that sort. I am convinced that those powers of arrest, examination and detention are essential parts of our battery of measures.

Let me anticipate one line of argument. I expect that it will be said that, because relatively few people are charged following detention, these powers are not needed. But that argument serves only to illustrate the misunderstanding of the situation. What these powers do, among other things, is to provide a sizeable deterrent to the movement of terrorists and of their materials. I am entirely satisfied from what I know that these powers do deter. They make life more difficult for terrorists. I am not prepared to remove deterrents from these people, and I do not think that Opposition Members should do so either.

I think that it is also relevant to remind the House that careful consideration is given to all applications for extensions of detention. Lord Colville acknowledges that diligence in his review and also notes that lengths of further detention were, in his words, "astutely fitted" to the stage which the police had reached in their investigations. I can therefore assure the House not only that are those powers necessary, but that they are used with all due care and attention to the rights of those detained.

May I turn now to the position of the Labour party and its attitude to the prevention of terrorism Act. It was a Labour Government who put the Act on the statute book in 1974, in the wake of a series of severe bombings. The powers of the Act were implemented by two Labour Home Secretaries, Roy Jenkins and the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees). They were also exercised by Labour Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland and Scotland. In 1983, the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook decided to change Labour's policy and to vote against re-enactment of this Act. That was the end of the bipartisan approach. That has been Labour's policy for the past eight years.

The right hon. Gentleman has been loudly condemned by his former colleagues and none with more feeling than the distinguished former Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, who said of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook in the debate in 1983:

"He is lucky that it becomes increasingly unlikely that he will ever become Home Secretary. If he did, he would be racked by a conflict between his genuine concern for public safety and the foolish commitments that are part of the games into which he has entered in opposition".—[*Official Report*, 7 March 1983; Vol. 38, c. 576.]

What an indictment of the right hon. Gentleman that those words are as true today as they were nine years ago.

The criticism of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook—he is smirking—by his own party members does not stop

[Mr. Baker]

there. The former Northern Ireland Secretary, Roy Mason, speaking in the House of Lords—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members are sneering at his name, but he was a member of the Cabinet, of which the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook was also a member, which fulfilled this Act. He said:

"To defeat the terrorists there is a price to pay. There is the inconvenience, irritation, annoyance with police and Special Branch Officers, and the curtailment of our total freedom and civil liberties. But to combat evil men we must maintain the full legal armoury that Parliament has decreed should be available, and that is what I urge my party and this House to do"—*[Official Report, House of Lords,* 16 February 1988; Vol. 493, c. 573.]

With all the irresponsibility that comes from absence of experience and high office, the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook thinks that he knows better than his former colleagues who had to bear those grave and serious responsibilities.

The right hon. Gentleman should note that if, by using the Act, a Home Secretary had excluded only one terrorist who would otherwise have been engaged in acts of murder in this country, the Act would have been worth while. I should have thought the example of the O'Donnell case, which I cited earlier, would give even him pause to think.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley) *rose*——

Mr. Baker: I shall not give way as I am dealing with the views of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook.

Last year, the right hon. Gentleman, in the conclusion to his speech, recommended that there should be inter-party talks and I dare say that we shall have that stale, meaningless camouflage trotted out again today. It is pathetic that the Labour party is going to call for a committee to fight terrorism. One does not fight terrorism with agendas. One does not reduce terrorist activity with minutes. One does not deal with terrorists by composite resolutions. One does not do it by talking tough and acting soft. What the public want is the prevention of terrorism, not a convention of terrorism. While all that talk goes on, what will happen to the 91 people who are excluded under the Act at the moment? Presumably, they will all be allowed in.

The policy that is now strung round the neck of the Labour party on terrorism is the particular invention of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook. He persuaded his party to change its course and policy back in 1983. He knows that police forces want the Act retained with all its powers. The chief police officers of our country made that clear in their evidence to the Select Committee on Home Affairs and various other senior police officers have also made that clear in recent days. Yet the right hon. Gentleman persists in wanting to weaken the powers that exist. I would expect the Leader of the Opposition to take a personal interest in this policy, as he aspires to a post in which he would have responsibility for national security. He should decide the Labour party's policy and take that power away from the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook. The policy of the Labour party is hugely unpopular and it is irresponsible.

Over the years the right hon. Gentleman has demeaned himself by trying to find weasel words such as "inter-party talks" and "searching for a national consensus". I tell him what the common purpose is. The common pupose is to fight terrorism with all the means at our disposal and with all the powers within this Act. That is what this country wants. That is what the country will get from this Government.

4.13 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): There was a moment 12 or 13 minutes into the right hon. Gentleman's speech when I thought that, for once, he was going to behave like a Home Secretary. That hope was dashed in the final five minutes of party conference sub-rhetoric.

I have to tell the Home Secretary straight away, although I wish to approach the subject with a more reasoned tone than he adopted, that we do not propose to take any lessons in dealing with terrorism from a Government who gave safe passage out of the country to the murderers of WPC Fletcher in order to avoid trouble with the Libyan Government. Nor do we propose to take any lessons on terrorism from a Home Secretary who presided over that matter when the two men most wanted for terrorism escaped from Brixton prison. He has not yet told the House how involved he was in the special branch farce leading to their escape.

The whole issue needs to be discussed in a far calmer way than the Home Secretary seems capable of these days. He behaved today as we have come to expect of him. He discussed the battle against terrorism in the language of an eve-of-poll rally and his last speech from the Dispatch Box has confirmed the reputation that he has established during years in this House—the cheapest Home Secretary this century.

I do not propose to reply in kind but to tell the Home Secretary that the record of the past 13 years shows that the Tory Government have been no more successful in their battle against terrorism than in their fight against crime. The shouting that we have heard today was intended to obscure failure. In government, the Labour party will fight terrorism with no less passion than the Government have shown but with more practical determination. Consequently, we shall have more practical success. I therefore propose to set out the practical changes that are needed.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: No.

I repeat the view that I expressed a year ago—indeed, it was less than a year ago because, for reasons that we can only guess, this debate has been brought forward: the fight against terrorism would be best conducted with all-party agreement about methods and objectives. The idea that all-party agreement requires committees seems to have been developed by the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten), yesterday.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge) *rose*——

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West) *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: If the Home Secretary is taking his lead from the Minister of State, no wonder he gets into so much trouble so often. Last week and again today, the Secretary of State rejected the idea of all-party agreement or an attempt at consensus because he is clearly looking for

single-party advantage. I must make it clear to him that, once the election is over, we shall renew the offer. We realise that all-party agreement is necessary if terrorism is to be defeated.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way, or is he frightened?

Mr. Hattersley: The hon. Gentleman terrifies me. That is why I am not giving way.

We realise that all-party agreement cannot be obtained by one side of the House—the Government—taking arbitrary decisions and expecting the other side of the House—the Opposition—to fall into line. If the Government want a common view on the subject, they must discuss what that common view should be. That will be our intention after the general election.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: No. I must make some progress.

There is already complete agreement between the parties on three parts of the Act. Parts I and III of the Act should not cause contention between us. None of us likes proscribing political organisations, yet all of us agree that, in the present circumstances, proscription is undoubtedly necessary. The IRA has no legitimate existence in a democratic society and we wholly endorse the part of the Act that makes it clear that it has no legal or legitimate role.

We also agree that is essential to prohibit the raising or provision of funds to finance terrorism. In our view, parts I and III of the Act must remain. Indeed, I repeat the view that I expressed last year—tougher powers and harsher penalties should be imposed on those who assist in the raising of funds for terrorism or who provide funds for terrorists.

Last year, I asked the Home Secretary whether he would consider operating in England and Wales the special powers available under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978. I believe that they should be extended to England and Wales, and I regret that the Home Secretary has not had the resolution to make that extension, which we would certainly have supported.

Part IV of the Act relates to arrest and detention, and requires more detailed examination. The subject needs to be examined against three principles. The first is the necessity to have within the criminal justice system special procedures that deal explicitly with the threat of terrorism. The second obligation is to accept that the special procedures must be consistent with the rule of law. The third obligation is to ensure that the special procedures are effective and obtain the results claimed of them.

Every authority—the Law Society, the Bar and the police—now says that one of the major obstacles in the fight against terrorism is the difficulty of obtaining convictions in terrorist trials, a subject with which the Home Secretary might have dealt when he considered the O'Donnell case. The Home Secretary was explicit in his self-congratulation—one of his great talents on having made an exclusion order against O'Donnell after he had been acquitted. How much better it would have been if O'Donnell had been convicted in this country.

Mr. Hind *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: The Law Society, the Bar and the police all specify that a major problem that must be overcome is the difficulty of obtaining convictions in terrorist cases. They unanimously agree that part IV of the prevention of terrorism Act does not assist in that process.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: I will give way, first, to the hon. Gentleman who is hailing me.

Mr. Nicholls: Before the right hon. Gentleman indulges in behaviour of that sort, he should look at some of the other Labour Front-Bench spokesmen.

The right hon. Gentleman's desire to see IRA terrorists convicted would carry a little more conviction if, every time one were convicted, one of his hon. Friends did not campaign to secure the terrorist's release.

Mr. Hattersley: For a number of reasons, that is one of the most disgraceful comments that I have ever heard in the House. I do not say that in defence of my hon. Friends, who can defend themselves, but on behalf of those men and women who were wrongfully convicted and were allowed out of prison only because of the campaigns of my right hon. and hon. Friends. For the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) to make that charge is not simply an attack on Labour Members, but a suggestion that those men and women who were imprisoned for long periods and then released should not have been released. That is a disgraceful thing for him to say. I shall now give way to a more reasonable Member.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I share the right hon. Gentleman's aspiration to achieve convictions in terrorist cases where guilt can be established by proper and civilised standards. However, I hope that he is not suggesting that we should reduce the standards of proof applied in the criminal courts of this country or the rules of evidence in terrorist cases. Does he not agree that, if the choice is between a potentially unfair conviction and an unfair exclusion order that leaves the subject at liberty, one has to choose the exclusion order every time?

Mr. Hattersley: Of course, I am not arguing for a reduction in the rules of evidence or the standards of procedure. Had I not given way to the hon. and learned Gentleman, he would have discovered that I am arguing for something different, perhaps quite the opposite.

Every authority—the Law Society, the Bar and the police—makes exactly the same point: part IV of the PTA does not assist in the process of obtaining convictions. The civil liberties arguments about how sections of that part work are overwhelming, but so is the practical argument that, if we are to improve the prospects of terrorists being convicted in British courts, it is essential to make some changes to that part.

I accept that a period of extended detention, even before charge, may be necessary; but the question is: how is that extension to be approved and how is the suspect to be treated during the period of the detention? That becomes particularly important when we recall that the suspect is arrested on reasonable suspicion alone; and doubly important when we realise that last year 153 persons—an extraordinary figure—were detained, yet only four of them were charged under the PTA.

In last year's report Lord Colville, to whom I offer my congratulations as the Home Secretary offered his, dealt at

[Mr. Hattersley]

length with extended detentions—extended up to the limit of seven days, extended not by judicial decision but by ministerial fiat. I do not doubt for a moment that the Home Secretary looked with great care and in person at each one of these orders, yet—this ought to concern a democratic House of Commons—is it right that a period of imprisonment can in effect be imposed by a Minister of the Crown, for that is what this provision amounts to?

I agree entirely with Lord Colville's general conclusion on the subject. He said last year:

"It is now perhaps irresistible that some new tribunal be set up to oversee these powers. It could draw on Scottish and Channel Island methodology."

He called for a "bold new initiative". This was not said by some Back-Bench Members of the Labour party about whom the Home Secretary has nightmares, nor by some radical in a civil rights organisation: it was said by the noble peer invited by the Home Secretary to conduct an inquiry into his own procedures. And the noble peer called for a bold new initiative on the way in which detention orders are extended. I make it clear today that we will provide——

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Would my right hon. Friend like to add that this noble peer is also a former Tory Home Office Minister, yet he is making these criticisms of the Act?

Mr. Hattersley: All these things add up to a formidable biography which should encourage the Home Secretary to take the noble Lord's words seriously, to weigh them genuinely and to react to them sensibly.

The Home Secretary knows that by referring to the Scottish and Channel Island methodology Lord Colville was invoking a system that involves an independent—indeed, a quasi-judicial—authority to approve extended detentions. That is why the Scots, unlike the English, have not been arraigned before the European Court for the way in which they extend detention from 48 hours to seven days. It is why the Scots, unlike the English, are not in breach of article 5 of the convention on human rights.

It is true to say that Lord Colville does not believe that the judiciary should approve extended detentions, since he said that that is not consistent with our legal traditions. That is why he talks about a new tribunal, but I make no apology for saying that I believe that the tribunal should be judicial—ideally, a judge sitting in chambers so that he can approve the detention without any risk of leakage of security information. As the Home Secretary knows, that was the view of the previous Home Secretary, too. He discussed this reform with the judges who were unwilling, or felt themselves unable, to co-operate in that scheme. I have no doubt that, if pressed by a determined Government, they will accept the scheme, so that this breach of the European convention, this damage to the reputation of our legal system and this deterrent to obtaining convictions, will thus be removed.

Mr. Hind: Lord Colville clearly supports the idea of detention orders and believes that they are necessary. Does the right hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Hattersley: Of course I do, which is why I said so five minutes ago. If the hon. Gentleman likes, I can repeat what I said. I accept that in special circumstances in the fight against terrorism extended detention may be necessary, but I believe, with Lord Colville and unlike the Home Secretary, that there should be judicial review before there is an extension from 48 hours to seven days. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will now concentrate so that he will not have to ask me to repeat what I have said.

This leaves the question of how we treat the suspect while he is in detention or the subject of extended detention. I take at its face value the assertion of previous Home Secretaries that the object of detention is not to trawl for information—it is not a haphazard intelligence-gathering exercise. It is a genuine attempt, after detaining a man or woman on suspicion, to prevent an offence from being committed, or to prosecute and convict the man or woman for an offence that has been committed. That requires common sense as well as respect for the rights of the suspect during the process of interrogation.

The suspects of whom we speak are not protected by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. However, that is the protection, the safeguard, which the Home Secretary insists on claiming would protect them and prevent a recurrence of the miscarriages of justice which have sent so many innocent men and women to prison in the past 20 years.

If the Maguires, the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six were charged again today, they would not be charged under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, with all the safeguards that that involves, but under the PTA without any of those safeguards. It was making exactly that point that led the new chairman of the Criminal Bar Association to say on television last week that it was no wonder the courts would not convict in terrorist cases, when the normal safeguards of interrogation were not available during the period between arrest and trial.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Perhaps I could help the right hon. Gentleman to make himself clear. He says that if the Birmingham Six were charged today they would be charged not under PACE but under the PTA. Charging is quite different from the arrest or holding of people in custody, which is done under the PTA. But the charge would be what it was—murder—and the criminal law would be used, not PACE.

Mr. Hattersley: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right and he makes my point with a precision that I wish I had used. They would have been detained under the PTA. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing up the argument that I was trying to address. As they would have been detained under the PTA, they would not have enjoyed any of the protection that would have been available to them under PACE. *[Interruption.]* If the Home Secretary wishes to argue with that contention, he will have to do so against all authority because that is undoubtedly the case. It is precisely because of that point that the chairman of the Criminal Bar Association said on television that it was not surprising that courts would not convict when detention did not carry with it safeguards governing rules of evidence that are common in the country. That is a tragically dangerous state of affairs and steps must be taken to remedy it.

I understand that it was in order to defeat that difficulty that the Home Secretary ordered the pilot scheme by which interviews conducted with PTA detainees in Liverpool and London are now being taped. I am surprised that the Home Secretary is arguing the point. I

have twice discussed the issue at length with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. He made it plain to me that he does not think that there should be any legislative change until the results of the pilot scheme are available. However, he puts the case for universal recording with such clarity that he needs a wider audience. I think that the Home Secretary has a copy of the letter that the commissioner sent to me. That is surprising, but I do not complain about it. As the Home Secretary will know from his oversight of my private correspondence the commissioner said:

"There is a strong argument that because interviews with all other suspects are recorded, the courts, juries and the public will see this as normal and accepted practice."

The commissioner then commented on how some lawyers would behave and went on to state:

"it is all very well saying that the law exempts such cases, but it is the effect on the jury that must be of concern."

I have made it plain, and I am happy to repeat it if the Home Secretary wants me to, that the commissioner went on to argue the opposite case and gave his view that no changes should be made until the results of the pilot scheme were announced. I could not have put the commissioner's view more clearly.

It is also suggested that some of the problem lies in Northern Ireland, and that the Home Secretary would act to provide PACE-style safeguards if he did not feel that that would prove detrimental to the position there. I hope that the Minister of State will deal with that point when he winds up the debate. We should not forget that, last year, Lord Colville told us that some members of the Northern Ireland judiciary were now pressing for the recording of interviews with suspects, and pressing for that to be done quickly. Let me make it clear that we shall introduce as many PACE safeguards as possible, and that the taping of interviews will be one of them. It is right in principle and necessary in practice, if convictions are to be obtained.

The third contentious area is, of course, part II, which deals with exclusion orders. Such orders have been described—not least by Sir Cyril Phillips, another of the distinguished gentlemen invited by the Home Secretary to conduct a review of the Act—as "internal exile". Sir Cyril, the first examiner of the Act, said that they should be abandoned, as their advantages were

"difficult to demonstrate in a convincing way."

In 1987 Lord Colville—I shall not give details of his impeccable pedigree—said that he believed that outright abolition of exclusion orders was the proper course. A year later, he said:

"I renew my recommendation that Part Two of the Act should not be renewed or replaced in the new Bill."

Twice, the Home Secretary rejected the recommendation of his own adjudicator. In 1987, Lord Colville accepted —as was required of him—that the last word rested with the Home Secretary. This year, he has observed—rather gloomily, some would say—that, while the rules governing exclusion orders have been meticulously observed—and I do not doubt that—where renewal was concerned,

"It is not for me to argue otherwise."

We shall accept Lord Colville's advice. We believe that exclusion orders are wrong in principle, and counter-productive in practice. It must surely be offensive to parts of the United Kingdom, such as Northern Ireland, to be treated like a dumping ground for terrorists from the mainland, and that certainly alienates law-abiding citizens who are caught unjustly by the provisions.

It is not only those who are excluded who are inconvenienced, temporarily imprisoned and, by implication, mortally insulted. Only 11 new exclusion orders were made last year—that is shown in table 9 of the statistics —but 10 times as many people were detained at ports and told that they were being considered for exclusion orders. I can think of nothing more likely to alienate the law-abiding Northern Ireland citizen from the process of law in this country than being treated in such a way.

It is, overwhelmingly, the question of exclusion orders that provides the illusion of activity; yet it may well be that, in the case that the Home Secretary chose to cite, the exclusion order did no more than transfer danger from one part of the United Kingdom to another—and, indeed, intensify the danger when the excluded man was returned to his colleagues, comrades and fellow conspirators. I want such people to be convicted, and they will not be convicted unless the prevention of terrorism Act is changed in such a way that the courts will respond to it in the manner that I believe even the Home Secretary hopes that they will.

In the time available to me, I have made two positive suggestions for change. I conclude as I began, by saying that those changes will come about; but I still believe that much would be gained in the fight against terrorism if they were agreed and supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House. Only the terrorist can secure anything approaching benefit from the kind of display that we saw from the Home Secretary, and from the suggestion that we are not resolute in our determination to beat terrorism. Although we may disagree about the ways in which it can be achieved, our common purpose is to drive the terrorist out of the United Kingdom once and for all.

Mr. Sayeed: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: No; I am finishing my speech now.

No one who has heard what the Labour party has to say on this subject could possibly interpret our view in the way in which the Home Secretary has chosen to interpret it today. The right hon. Gentleman will, of course, continue to do so between now and polling day, but that does not diminish us; it diminishes him. We shall go on saying what is right and necessary and when we are elected in six weeks' time we shall put that into operation.

4.39 pm

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). He is, if I may put it in my own words, a very distinguished parliamentary relic. What he has said about the measure is of very great importance. In the few moments that I have, I intend to touch on some of those issues. I am bound to say, however, that the right hon. Gentleman's speech lacked any potential for exciting intestinal commotions, due to its curious construction and the way in which he sat on the hedge when it came to some of these very complicated issues.

The right hon. Gentleman's reference in his opening remarks to the Libyan embassy incident of many years ago was, frankly, both shameful and unfortunate. His attempt to link my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary with the escape from Brixton prison was unworthy of him. I am sorry that he chose to introduce those remarks into the debate when there were serious questions to be considered, which he subsequently went on to discuss.

[Sir John Wheeler]

The difficulty for the House is that all of us on both sides, regardless of party, are united in the belief that we should prefer to do without this Act altogether. It is an exceptional Act to deal with the exceptional activity of terrorism. The very nature of the terrorist act requires measures to be available to those who have to fight terrorism in a practical way. The justification for these measures must be whether the police and the law enforcement agencies in Northern Ireland and in the rest of the United Kingdom think that the Act and its measures are necessary and desirable. My advice is that they do. They have said so to me on a number of occasions. As long as the police and the intelligence agencies make their case —that they require the provisions of this Act—it behoves the House to give them the support that they deserve.

Mr. Hind: Does my hon. Friend agree that the fact that we expect that the Labour party will vote against the order sends entirely the wrong message to those who are actively involved in terrorism, both on the mainland in the United Kingdom and in Northern Ireland and elsewhere—that in some way we are divided over this vital matter which affects the protection of our community not only in Britain but in Northern Ireland itself? Does my hon. Friend feel that this is a shame and that it should be rectified, and that on this occasion the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and his supporters should think again?

Sir John Wheeler: My hon. Friend is right to make that point. If the suggestion is that we should repeal the Act and replace it with a committee of the House, which seems to be the right hon. Gentleman's suggestion, it would appear that, somehow or another, the institution of Parliament is not united behind the police in giving them what they say they require in order to maintain their prosecution of terrorism.

Mr. Hattersley: I must let the hon. Gentleman into a secret. The point that he makes about a committee of the House is a simple absurdity. From time to time Ministers of the Crown, even as illustrious as the Secretary of State for the Home Department, ask their opposite numbers to discuss with them matters that they believe to be in the national interest. I am happy for the Home Secretary to make public every occasion that he has made that request to me. What I am saying is that this is one of the occasions when a similar technique should be operated. The idea of a committee is an invention of the Minister of State and by definition, therefore, is trivial.

Sir John Wheeler: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He makes his position clear. If, as I understand it, he implies that there should be an occasional meeting of right hon. Members who are members of Her Majesty's Privy Council to discuss the operation of the Act, or how it should be amended, or what further additions should be made to it, I have to point out to him that that is what happens today and that it has prevailed for many years.

Mr. Hattersley: Oh, no, it has not.

Sir John Wheeler: It is perfectly possible for Privy Councillors to have discussions of the kind that he suggests without there being a vote against the Act, or a repeal of the Act, because there would flow from such discussions any changes that were thought to be desirable. As I have already said, however, the substantive reason for retaining the Act on the statute book is that the police and the law enforcement agencies believe it to be essential. Are we to go against the overwhelming weight of professional advice when the incidence of terrorism prevails in the United Kingdom as well as in Northern Ireland?

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir John Wheeler: Perhaps my hon. Friend will allow me to finish this point.

Statistical information relating to the operation of the Act provides evidence that we are also dealing with a rising tide of international terrorism, which is also caught and covered by the provisions of the Act.

Sir Anthony Durant: Does not my hon. Friend find it surprising that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) did not answer the Home Secretary's question about Lord Mason and Lord Jenkins, both of whom are distinguished members of his party, who support the Act?

Sir John Wheeler: My hon. Friend is right. Two distinguished Privy Councillors have expressed a view. Whether there would be any further purpose, therefore, in a wider gathering of Privy Councillors to cogitate on the progress of the Act seems to me to be doubtful. It sounds to me very much like a case of avoiding the principle of the issue. There are some in the Labour party who are resolutely opposed to the Act and who intend to vote against its continuance. I understand the difficulty that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook faces in that context.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the exclusion orders. The statistics show that there have been few such orders. They can be subject to independent review by the three adjudicators, the so-called wise men. Provision has been made for that. Adjudicators are thought to be desirable. They are used only in extreme cases and remain a valuable tool.

The right hon. Gentleman also touched on the tape recording of interviews and, allied to that, the video recording of interviews.

Ms. Short: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir John Wheeler: Perhaps the hon. Lady will allow me to develop this point, and then I shall give way.

Of course, the tape recording of interviews is a thoroughly desirable objective, with which I have considerable sympathy, as the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis set out in his letter to the right hon. Gentleman and as he has said to me in conversation. The difficulty, however, if there are tape recordings or video recordings of interviews with terrorist suspects, is whether they subsequently become available to the courts and thus come under public scrutiny and put in jeopardy the lives of people who are fighting terrorism, or the lives of would-be informants, or the lives of the individuals themselves. The behaviour of suspects during interviews and the statements that suspects may make in private to the police and other officers are often significant and helpful in the combating of terrorism. That is the danger—terrorism is exceptional and cannot be treated in the same way as fraud, auto-crime or burglary.

Ms. Short: May I take the hon. Gentleman back to the question of exclusion orders? It seems that the logic of exclusion orders is to remove from Britain people who are thought to be dangerous and who might be involved in killing people for political purposes and to send them to Northern Ireland where the network of those who kill for political purposes is more powerful. Those people are, therefore, more likely to kill, so the logic is that life in Northern Ireland is less important and less valuable than life in Britain. That is outrageous. Our laws should seek to convict those believed to be involved in terrorism rather than to dump them in Northern Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler: I am grateful to the hon. Lady because she raises issues to which the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook referred. As she must know, herein lies the difficulty of obtaining convictions for criminal offences committed by persons who are called terrorists—there is no such thing as a crime of terrorism. A person must be arraigned before a jury in England or Wales and charged with a criminal offence. Evidence must be obtained and presented to the jury, which must be able, without any qualification, to convict on that evidence.

As the hon. Lady will know, it is very difficult to obtain that information in the case of terrorists. One reason why it is difficult is that some information that comes into the possession of the police and others cannot be made public in the court room without putting in jeopardy other anti-terrorist operations. These are the difficulties which the House, the police and the judicial system suffer. In Northern Ireland one-judge Diplock courts must operate because of the threat that terrorists make to would-be jurors. We regret that, but we must face reality.

The hon. Lady also said that it was wrong for people excluded from England, Wales and Scotland to be returned to Northern Ireland. But if they hail from Northern Ireland they must go back to the Province if that is where their home is. She then said that such people could be a further threat to the citizens of Northern Ireland. Some hon. Members may make the case—and I have heard some do so to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—for selective internment so that such people do not pose a threat to the citizens of Northern Ireland. I shall not make that case—I leave it to others who may choose to do so—but that is the implication of the hon. Lady's intervention.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): Does not it strengthen my hon. Friend's argument to recall that, from time to time, the IRA has taken on the additional dimension of a mainland campaign and that exclusion orders can therefore be seen as a specific weapon to combat that dimension of IRA activity?

Sir John Wheeler: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We know that terrorists have operated on the continent of Europe and the issues that we face are very complicated.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook considered the report by Lord Colville of Culross. I have also read that report and I agree with the right hon. Gentleman and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that it is a thorough review and that we should be grateful to Lord Colville for the independence and objectivity of mind that he brought to it.

The problem is that in a democracy, while we may review the issue, that review does not necessarily produce the evidence for abandoning the provisions of the Act. I continue to support the Act's substantial provisions, including that to proscribe terrorist organisations. It would be inconceivable for persons in England to parade through the streets seeking to raise funds for or to promote a terrorist cause in the aftermath of some terrible incident that had been seen on the nation's television screens and for there to be no way of proscribing that activity. There would be considerable outrage among people, so it is essential that the proscribing provision should remain part of the Act.

The power to arrest and to detain people for up to 48 hours and for extensions thereof under the authority of the Secretary of State is also essential. Examination of the statistics shows that the Secretary of State's authorisation is sparingly given in a limited number of cases, but the fact that it exists and that officials must convince the Secretary of State of the necessity to allow an extension is a reasonable balance of rights, and it is vital that the power remains in the Act.

Another essential power is that of controlling the movements of passengers into and out of the United Kingdom. In the coming years, the issue of the removal of internal frontiers within the Community will make that provision all the more important. Police agencies advise that without that power to control the movement of certain parties into and out of the United Kingdom they would be in serious jeopardy. We must continue to review matters in the light of developments within the Community.

The Bill remains an important part—although not the whole—of our fight against terrorism, whether it originates within the United Kingdom or externally. Of the 121 detentions in 1991, 79 per cent. were in connection with Northern Irish terrorism, but it is significant that 32 detentions in 1991 were in connection with international terrorism, a problem which is increasing within the European Community and the world in general. On that basis alone, it is essential that the provision to control movement into and out of the United Kingdom is available to the police and other authorities to enable them to continue the fight for liberty and democracy on behalf of the overwhelming majority of ordinary people in this country.

4.57 pm

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): I feel enormous disrespect for the Home Secretary's attempt today to use the grave and terrible problem of violence in Northern Ireland for cheap party-political purposes. How low will the Government stoop? The issue of violence in Northern Ireland is of enormous importance and is one of the gravest with which the House must deal. We are talking about life or death for large and, sadly, at the moment increasing numbers of people.

One would expect the House to rise to the seriousness of the challenge and to discuss the problem with great sincerity and thoroughness. However, the Home Secretary gave the lead and, in their interventions, members of the Tory party tried merely to play games because they think that they can score points which will help them in the forthcoming general election.

As has been mentioned, the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1974 was introduced by a Labour Government in the immediate aftermath of the Birmingham pub bombings when there was an atomsphere of enormous anger—even

[Ms. Clare Short]

hysteria—in the country and in the House. There was also enormous fear at the the Home Office that the House would push through the reintroduction of capital punishment.

At that time I was working in the Home Office as a private secretary to one of its Ministers of State. Roy Jenkins' fear was very great and the Prevention of Terrorism Act was cobbled together very rapidly. I sat in the Box and listened on the night it was debated. Roy Jenkins had asked Brian Walden—a former Labour Member of Parliament for Birmingham, Ladywood who has admitted to me that he can always argue any case—to speak against the reintroduction of capital punishment. He made a brilliant speech in the context of a powerful and overwhelming fear in the Home Office.

Mr. Nicholls: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an ex-civil servant, who is now a Member of the House, to talk about what went on—which presumably includes advice to Ministers—during the time when she was a civil servant? I have never heard anything like that in my life.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): It is not a matter for the Chair. It is the responsibility of the hon. Lady.

Ms. Short: That is absolutely right, Mr. Deputy Speaker: it is my responsibility. As I believe that the matter is of such importance and that it is a matter of life or death for people in Northern Ireland, it is important to share that experience with the House. It may elevate the tone of the debate and enable serious discussion about the merits or demerits of the Act. There is nothing improper and there is nothing that the public should not know. We have even been told this weekend that the Prime Minister may suddenly be in favour of a freedom of information Act. If we had such an Act, everyone in the world would be able to see the documentation to which I am referring.

I have described the mood and the fear. The Bill was put together very rapidly. I discussed whether it would have any merit with the man who put it together. He agreed that its main purpose was to prevent the restoration of capital punishment. Thank heavens that that was done otherwise the six men who spent all those years in prison for the Birmingham pub bombing would be dead instead of having been released after suffering that long deprivation of liberty. The people who were convicted of the Guildford bombings would be dead if the Tory party had had its way that night. The poor, wretched man whom the previous Tory Home Secretary so badly failed to defend and who was falsely convicted of the murder of a young girl would also be dead. I have described the purpose of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which prevented something much worse that night.

It is the duty of any serious people who sit in the House to look at the Act's record to see whether it achieves anything and whether it prevents terrorism. Have we reached the point at which calling the legislation the "Prevention of Terrorism" Act means that it can never be scrutinised? As it has its purpose in its title, does that mean that anyone who says that the Act may not be effective or that it may need changing will instantly be accused of being soft on terrorism? That is what is going on in the House today and it is beneath contempt.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): I agree entirely with the hon. Lady that this matter should be debated rationally. I point out to her that if the purpose of the Act was to avoid the reintroduction of capital punishment, it could have been repealed quickly once the hoo-hah had died down; it was not.

After the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four and the Maguires, matters have changed. I am especially concerned about the way in which the Act deals with people who are in detention, which could be improved in practice. There is nothing wrong with discussing that; indeed, it is entirely right that we should discuss that. However, if the Labour party insists on voting against the Act tonight, people over there will not see it like that. They will see it as a sign of division and weakness in the House. I will discuss the Act with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) or with any Labour Members as long as they say that they agree that the purpose of the Act is to defeat terrorism. The Act is one part of the armoury, so let us keep it. However, it can and should be improved.

Ms. Short: I give the hon. Gentleman credit for being big enough to say—which is more than any other Conservative Members have—that the Act could be improved in the provisions dealing with the way in which people are detained, which led to the mistreatment of the Birmingham Six. We should learn from that and modify the powers of detention. However, the hon. Gentleman then went on to play the Government's game.

All hon. Members know that the Labour party wants to prevent and end violence in Northern Ireland as much as any Conservative Member does. Any serious politician knows that to be the truth. Yet what are Tory Members doing today? They are taunting us and trying to pretend that Labour is soft on terrorism. If anything is sending a confused message to Northern Ireland it is that silly, crass party political game which the Tory party is playing today. It is not any argument that Labour is putting forward.

Our party introduced the Act, so we feel responsible for it. We have looked at its record and we know that vast numbers of people have been detained under it, but then never charged. We, especially those of us who, like me, are of Irish origin and are in contact with people of Irish origin in this country, know that the 8 million people of Irish descent in Britain are angry with, alienated by and fearful of the Act. They are fearful that completely innocent people will be stopped and detained.

Anyone who is serious about bringing terrorism to an end knows that we must foster a great sense of trust in the security services and belief in the justice of the criminal justice system so that people will pass on information and have confidence in the system. Mao said that terrorists were the fish who swim in the sea of the public's attitudes and he spoke about the public's alienation from the system. It is overwhelmingly the case that people of Irish origin in Britain hate violence in Northern Ireland. They feel it more deeply than most English people do because they are aware of the involvement and history of their own people in that struggle. I feel it deeply myself. Most hon. Members know that my father came from Northern Ireland. It is an issue of great concern to us.

There is no doubt that the Act alienates people who hate terrorism and who hate the IRA from our criminal justice system generally and from the police force. They feel that they are in danger of being wrongly detained

when they visit Ireland. The Act has had an effect opposite to the effect that the title claims. It helps to create an atmosphere of alienation from a sense of confidence in the security services in Britain. Terrorist organisations want to engender such an atmosphere. That is our main and overwhelming criticism of the Act, and it is a serious criticism. I have described the true feeling among the Irish community and I wish that the Tory party would take that seriously.

The level of support in Northern Ireland for the men of violence is declining rapidly. Hon. Members may remember that the IRA went out of existence in the 1960s when it fizzled out after the border campaign. There was no IRA in Northern Ireland. We want to learn from that and to achieve that again. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who is here today, knows that many of us have respect for his approach to questions in Northern Ireland. The way to achieve our objective is for people in Northern Ireland and Irish people in Britain to know that Britain behaves justly in Northern Ireland and that it is against all discrimination, that the criminal justice system is fair, that people will be treated properly, that change can be achieved democratically, and that violence is out of order and should never be supported or applauded.

We can make greater progress. My own party's approach, both generally in its policy for Northern Ireland of working for the reunification of Ireland, but with the consent of the majority of people in the country, and specifically in advocating the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and of retaining only the powers necessary effectively to catch terrorists, will speed the day when violence will end in Northern Ireland. The Tory party's attitude today is deeply shameful. Playing games with the question shows that it has no standards at all in this pre-election period.

5.6 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) said that the IRA went out of existence. We are not dealing now with the Official IRA; we are dealing with the Provisional IRA. The Provisional IRA has never been out of existence since it began. We are dealing with a different organisation altogether and with something which has been spawned in the recent violence and was helped forward by certain parties in the Irish Republic. We are dealing with a campaign of violence which was never paralleled in Northern Ireland by the stickies, as the Official IRA is called. The House should be clear about what we are up against.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said that the only way to defeat terrorism is by all-party agreement in the House. I challenge that. I sat in the House when the legislation went through. I have been in the House for 22 years and there has been a wide consensus between Labour and Conservative Governments about how they should deal with terrorism in Northern Ireland. Have they defeated terrorism in Northern Ireland? There has been agreement in the House, but it has not defeated terrorism in Northern Ireland. We should not be looking at the sad and tragic state of Ulster today if terrorism had been defeated because of consensus in the House.

There is only one thing that will defeat terrorism. The House does not like to hear it and never did like to hear it. Terrorism will be defeated not by consensus or agreement in this House but when the ruling Government of the time put it down with courage and resolution. Terrorism can be destroyed only when those who bear responsibility make the necessary effort and ask the House for the necessary powers to defeat it.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook and others have argued that there is great difficulty in getting terrorist convictions in the courts. If that is so, what happens when one lets a person like O'Donnell out? I do not criticise the jury in the O'Donnell trial; no doubt they were honest people trying to reach an honest decision. There were a lot of pressures, arising from the cases of the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four, at the time when the jury was trying to reach a decision. With all the eloquence of Irish blarney, O'Donnell completely bluffed that jury. He talked about his belief in God. He talked about his family and said that he was brought up to oppose violence.

I have some knowledge of Irish republicanism and of the way in which Irish republicans act. They can bluff, and that jury was bluffed. Many of them said, "This is a decent fellow who has got into difficulties. We must decide in his favour."

What is one to do with an O'Donnell—or with a multitude of O'Donnells—if one cannot get a conviction in a court of law? What can one do, other than use the exclusion order? The only option is to return such people. That is the argument that the Opposition must face. I do not like Northern Ireland being a dumping ground for terrorists, but I would rather limit the terrorists to certain places. I should have thought that, after what happened in London, O'Donnell's effectiveness in England would be over, and that he would probably have come back to Northern Ireland anyway. The point is that he was arrested in Northern Ireland and the police could not get evidence to charge him and put him to a court hearing. We know what happened thereafter.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and pay tribute to him, because he profoundly believes what he says. Many of us believe differently, however, and if there is one thing about the prevention of terrorism Act that stands out a mile it is that it does not prevent terrorism. In fact, terrorism is worse now than it has practically ever been. I was here on the night when the bombs went off. There was no bluffing about what happened to the Guildford Four, the Birmingham Six, the Maguires and others. Not only does the Act not prevent terrorism; it does terrible things to people and thus encourages terrorism.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I do not think that the Act is responsible for what happens in the courts after a terrorist is charged. That is a matter for the courts. There can be miscarriages of justice in the best possible society. That happens, as we saw recently in another case that had nothing to do with terrorism. My point is that if one argues, first, that it is difficult to get a terrorist conviction in court and, secondly, that one cannot do anything with the people when they are let out, internment is the only option. That is the only way to take them out of society.

The Home Secretary seemed to think that the fact that those who support terrorism have been banned from speaking on radio or television had been helpful. On our television and radio, that ban has become a farce, because the media use actors to play the Gerry Adamses of this

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world. Broadcasters say, "You cannot hear these people because of legislation," but then get an actor to repeat what they have said. That is the height of folly. Moreover, when an election comes, the ban is dropped and these people are suddenly respectable citizens who can fight the election and get whatever coverage the media will give them. That is a travesty and an insult to those dedicated to fighting and defeating terrorism.

We have heard it said that it would be outrageous if marches could be organised after an atrocity—that ordinary people would be outraged. At present, however, Sinn Fein, which is not banned, can organise such marches. That is what we are up against. Even in Glasgow, a march was organised contrary to the wishes of many people in the city. It went ahead in spite of efforts to prevent it and people were, indeed, outraged. I believe—and I remind the Home Secretary that I raised this matter with him last year—that if one is going to ban the IRA, one should ban Sinn Fein, because it is part of the IRA, and the police say that it is part of the IRA.

The leaders of the republicans defend violence. Someone whose relations have been murdered by the IRA may find himself sitting in a council chamber while IRA men posing as Sinn Fein members oppose the council's decision to pass a resolution of condolence. Why should people be forced into such circumstances?

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): Would the hon. Gentleman be surprised to learn that, for the past four years, my political opponent in the forthcoming election has been organising a platform of Sinn Fein speakers to make a case on the escalating violence in Northern Ireland, because, he says, they have been denied their right to speak on the radio in Northern Ireland?

Rev. Ian Paisley: People who say that should look to the south of Ireland. It was Conor Cruise O'Brien who first introduced the restrictions against the IRA in the south of Ireland. Those restrictions came not from this Government or from this side of the water but from the south of Ireland.

The Government must grasp the nettle. We cannot have IRA men, making the very same statements that IRA men would, wearing the respectable robe of Sinn Fein, as it were. Even in Dublin, the last Ardeis of the IRA was banned from the Mansion house. When asked why, the people said, "Because they support violence." Sinn Fein must be dealt with.

It would be sad if we sent to the people of Northern Ireland—who do not know the ins and outs of what we are discussing, but who know that a prevention of terrorism Act is being discussed—the wrong message. It would be a tragedy if they got the message that the House was divided rather than united on this issue. I know the different arguments, and people are entitled to their views, but we must consider the way in which these matters are perceived in our country, which has its back to the wall.

5.18 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): The Home Secretary referred to his broadcasting ban, which the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) described as a farce. It is a farce because, often, what happens in practice is that someone else says the words of the banned spokesman while the pictures of the banned spokesman are seen. That is sometimes done so skilfully that it is almost impossible to tell whether one is dealing with the actual person who is speaking. In that way, the ban has been rendered utterly ineffective. Sometimes, people who should be covered by the ban can get round it by making comments that are regarded as not falling within the ban. As the hon. Member for Antrim, North said, that is different from the practice in the Republic of Ireland which, in that respect, is much superior to the practice in the United Kindom.

The terms of the ban in the Republic are the same as in the United Kingdom. In other words, the direction given to the broadcasting authorities in the United Kingdom is in the same words as the legislation in the Irish Republic. The difference arises because a Home Office official provided the broadcasting authorities with guidance in a letter which created two loopholes. Exactly the same wording is interpreted differently in the Republic of Ireland. As the hon. Member for Antrim, North said, the practice in the Republic is superior. To bring the practice in the United Kingdom into line with the practice in the Republic, the guidance provided by the Home Office official—presumably with ministerial support—should be withdrawn. The ban should be operated in exactly the same way in the United Kingdom as it is operated in the Republic.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that another practical effect of the broadcasting ban is that statements can be made by proscribed organisations without any challenge? That prevents the dialogue of debate whereby the ethics and politics of those who support violence can be rebutted in public by those who are opposed to that means of achieving political objectives. That is a much more serious effect of the ban than the facade of caricatures.

Mr. Trimble: I am sorry to have to disagree about that. I have heard it argued that the ban prevents the spokesmen and apologists for the terrorists from being subjected to vigorous cross-examination. There was no evidence of that before the ban. Broadcasters and journalists were singularly lacking in that regard and we know the reason for that: they were scared about what would happen. If the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) is suggesting that other political representatives who compete for support with the terrorists would be more vigorous in their attacks on them, that might be a side effect and benefit. However, that is a different matter.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) explained the Labour party's position in respect of the legislation. Although I may be wrong, he seemed to suggest that Labour supported the prevention of terrorism legislation with just three qualifications. He said that Labour supported parts I and III and the principle of part IV; but that he was worried about the safeguards on periods of detention. He said that he was worried about what we might call the Brogan point which relates to how extension is to be authorised. The only other point that he criticised was that in respect of exclusion orders.

If the reservations of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook with regard to the prevention of terrorism Act are limited to those points, which are comparatively minor points in respect of the legislation as a whole, I would have some sympathy with two of his three points. However, I

will have no difficulty in supporting the order if there is a Division. I hope that that lead will be given if there is a Division because we would give the wrong message to the country and to the terrorists if there is a Division on the issue in the House and it was revealed that there was substantial opposition to the fight against terrorism.

I support the legislation. Like other hon. Members, I congratulate Lord Colville on his report which is particularly good. However, a general three-hour debate in the House is not an adequate response to the report. I hope that there will be other ways in which parliamentary supervision of the legislation can be enhanced rather than us simply having this brief annual debate. This debate is not an adequate response, safeguard or oversight of such legislation and I hope that we can develop our procedures.

I want to draw attention to the passage in Lord Colville's report that deals with allegations of assault during detention. Of course the police are not all angels and occasionally mistakes are made and officers may not behave as they should. One must admit that occasionally ill treatment has occurred. However, the record shows that such lapses are extremely rare. On the other hand, there are many complaints and the number of complaints is increasing. However, those complaints are very rarely substantiated. The reason for that is that the complaints are made largely to waste police time; to tie up as many police officers as possible in investigating complaints; to inhibit police officers in carrying out their duties. The police know that if they carry out their duties comprehensively or with any enthusiasm or application, complaints will be made. Complaints are made also to muddy the waters by giving a false impression of the way in which the police forces operate.

In his report Lord Colville gives careful consideration to that matter. He shows that documentary evidence to rebut accusations of ill treatment is or could easily be available and could be produced in court if cases of people complaining of ill treatment were fought. I echo Lord Colville's criticism when he says that there appears to be a policy of settling cases when people have brought civil actions against police authorities. That is a wholly bad practice and I hope that it is discontinued.

I hope that a message from the Government will go out to the relevant departments that, when people bring actions against the police alleging ill treatment while in detention, those cases will be fought in open court and the evidence will be produced so that the cases can be resolved properly. The present situation in which complainants are bought off by paying them damages, often in completely unmeritorious cases, does not work and it creates an impression of guilt. As Lord Colville states in his report in his reference to a meeting of the United Nations committee against torture, that committee was given a false impression. Dubious bodies like the Committee on the Administration of Justice in Northern Ireland can use such material to blacken the security forces. Where actions are brought by people who have been interrogated and allege ill treatment, it is important that such cases are fought in open court so that the truth can be established instead of people being allowed to blacken the security forces.

I said earlier that I have some reservations about the legislation. As hon. Members are probably aware, our reservations relate particularly to exclusion orders. I am quite sure that exclusion orders, as they operate under the legislation, are wrong in principle. They send the wrong message. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is present today——

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has been here throughout the debate.

Mr. Trimble: The Secretary of State said recently in Newcastle upon Tyne:

> "The strongest message that we can send from this part of the United Kingdom to our fellow citizens in Northern Ireland is that we are in it together, that we shall stand together to defeat terrorism, and nothing will divide us"—

unless, of course, we happen to find a terrorist in England who comes from Northern Ireland because we will not then stand together. The terrorist will be dumped back with us in Northern Ireland. In practice, exclusion orders undermine what would be the admirable sentiment behind the Secretary of State's words. In this respect, it does not matter so much what one says; what one does is what matters and that disproves the sentiment that was uttered.

Reference has been made to exclusion orders as a form of internal exile. That is not accurate. Under exclusion orders, a person is sent back to the area from which he came. We might consider a real form of internal exile. When the Italians deal with organisations like the Mafia, they have powers of internal exile. People are not exiled to their homes, but elsewhere, perhaps hundreds of miles away from their homes to a place where they are cut off from the organisations of which they are a part and they are kept under police supervision. Ministers might like to consider that form of internal exile. It would be preferable to the so-called internal exile that operates at the moment.

The matter of exclusion orders brings us to the O'Donnell case. The Home Secretary congratulated himself on deporting that gentleman to Northern Ireland after he had been acquitted. We now know, of course, that Mr. O'Donnell became or was a leading member of the east Tyrone brigade of the IRA and was later very active in the killings and bombings that took place in that area. Reference to the O'Donnell case brings up some significant points that should be made.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook said that the Opposition wanted not exclusion but terrorists to be convicted. I think that I am right in saying that Mr. O'Donnell exercised his so-called right to silence throughout the time he was in custody, remained silent when being questioned, gave the police no indication of what line of defence he would take until the case came up for trial, and then sprang his defence which the jury unfortunately believed. Would the jury have believed that defence had the facts with regard to the accused's behaviour while in custody been available to them?

Only a few years ago, the Government introduced modifications to the so-called right to silence with regard to Northern Ireland. Those modifications, as the Government know, were quite slight. They have not had a dramatic impact; they are modest but useful improvements in the law. If those modest but useful improvements had been available in the O'Donnell case, the jury might have convicted. That case draws attention to the need to bring the law in Great Britain into line with the law in Northern Ireland on that point.

[Mr. Trimble]

Another aspect in which that should be done—it is highlighted on pages 15 to 16 of the report—is what Lord Colville calls the "legislative shambles" of the measures dealing with terrorist finances. As Lord Colville says:

"There is much need for a comprehensive round of reciprocal powers and duties. The 'legislative shambles' was only enhanced by the EPA's 1991."

He goes on to state:

"It may be that these provisions should then be combined with the financial parts of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 and its Northern Irish equivalent: there is still nothing of that sort available in Scotland."

In so far as the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook argued for uniform provisions throughout the United Kingdom, I fully agree with him. I was surprised that the Home Secretary suggested that the provisions would not work in Great Britain. I should be very interested if any reason can be given showing why they would not work.

Comprehensive uniform provision for the whole United Kingdom should not be limited simply to terrorist finances but should cover the whole range of anti-terrorist legislation. As has been said before, there is a clear need for a single United Kingdom-wide anti-terrorist Act which covers the whole range, rather than some powers being available in Northern Ireland, some powers available in Great Britain and not an exact match between the two. One aspect in which the mismatch is obvious concerns the lists of proscribed organisations. Only two are proscribed in Great Britain, but eight are proscribed in Northern Ireland. That is crazy and it underlines the need for comprehensive United Kingdom-wide legislation. Lord Colville refers to another need. Page 2 of his report states:

"At present it is unclear what will happen after next January. It is no good relegating this issue . . . I find it extremely disturbing that there is so much uncertainty on the ground. Nobody now supposes that terrorists will book themselves on to obvious flights; for the Northern Irish from the Island to GB Ports; for the international from far afield to major international airports. Who thinks they are so naive? Experience shows the reverse.

I remain of the opinion that the idea of 'designation' of air and seaports, founded solely on a sufficient traffic within the Common Travel Area, is misconceived . . . What will happen next year about frontier controls in Great Britain depends entirely on the extent of a police presence if Customs and Immigration withdraw, in part at least. Parliament might also wish to contemplate the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic, on which I have commented before."

Lord Colville is referring to what will happen in the context of what we call 1992 and the European Community—what will happen to the powers with regard to movement into the United Kingdom as a whole.

Many of the prevention of terrorism provisions deal with the movement of people between Northern Ireland or the island of Ireland and Great Britain. We need more comprehensive provisions dealing with movement into and out of the United Kingdom as a whole. We must have provisions that operate not just at airports and ports on either side of the Irish sea but at airports and ports facing the continent. Lord Colville suggests that, on occasions, instead of moving directly from the island of Ireland to Great Britain, terrorists move indirectly through continental staging posts and thus are not caught by the legislation. We need more comprehensive provisions that will work despite what the European Community does on movement within the EC as a result of 1992. We might also, as Lord Colville says,

"contemplate the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic".

That border remains, as many security force personnel have said, a resource for terrorists, and the sooner that it is subject to detailed control, the better.

5.35 pm

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): I hate the party game. I resent the idea that everything said by the Opposition is wrong, bad, unworthy and so on and that everything said by one's own party is right and virtuous. I always look for the good points in the Labour party's policy, realising that Labour Members sometimes—in my opinion, anyway—get it right and sometimes have constructive points to make about legislation. However, on this issue, there is absolutely no excuse at all for their policy. It is absolutely contemptible.

Labour Members are assisting the enemies of this country under the guise of the protection of civil liberties, but they know that the people whom they are assisting come from a minority of people within the United Kingdom who are engaged in violence against the majority because they cannot get their own way through the ballot box. So they have chosen to set aside the ballot box and ordinary civilised methods of persuasion and use violence instead. Labour Members know very well that it is out of the appeasement of Irish republicanism, which has infiltrated their own ranks, that they do not support restrictions on terrorists.

If Labour Members cannot see the connection between those two points—they are continually suggesting that there is no connection—they must be fools. However, Labour Members' attitude to this subject is one in respect of which they cannot be accused of folly, because they are not fools. They know very well what they are doing. They know the effect that it has on the country, especially on our enemies—on Irish republicans who take to violence. They know that it is interpreted as encouragement, not opposition. Because they appease the men of violence, they share the same objective—a united Ireland which would involve the overcoming of British people in Northern Ireland.

Opposition Front-Bench Members are very sensitive about this matter. Individually, they are decent and honourable people. That is why they are so sensitive about it. They know very well that their motive is unworthy. The motive of the Labour party and its policy is unworthy. It is directed against the interests of the people of this country generally; it is directed against the British nation. Yet Labour Members pursue it. Why is that? It is for unworthy motives.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) protests that the reason why Labour Members will not support the very legislation that they themselves brought in is some defect which has suddenly appeared and which is contrary to civil liberties in this country. We must examine their specific points of complaint. For example, who has the right to agree and authorise an extended period of interview of suspects? I can see that there is a strong argument in principle for saying that that right should be conferred on some sort of judicial authority. That point is certainly debatable and arguable. But it is no justification for voting against the very measure that is directed against terrorism in Britain.

That argument is spurious; it is bogus; it is unworthy of the intelligence of Members of Parliament who make it; it is petty. Yet that is how Labour Members argue.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): What about Colville's recommendations?

Mr. Stanbrook: The name Colville has just been mentioned. Of course, Colville is in favour of the continuation of the order in principle and in general. He suggests intelligent, sensible and reasonable modifications. It would certainly be open to the Labour party to propose such modifications. The time to do so is when the principle of the Bill has been accepted. That is the same principle that we apply to all legislation. We debate the principle on Second Reading. If there is a point, an amendment or an improvement to be made or if some particular part of the Bill is unacceptable we debate it in Standing Committee. Individual Members and parties have their opportunity to vote against it. That is not what the Labour party is doing on this occasion. The Labour party is voting against the whole of the special legislation directed against terrorism.

I do not know why I should bother about the Labour party's position, because, after all, it is a point against the Labour party in the minds of the general public. The public cannot understand why the attitude of the Labour party is so feeble and spineless and why it is apparently willing to appease the enemies of this country and the violence that they bring upon us all.

Of course, terrorism is not merely one problem for Britain. It is an evil; it is a wicked thing, the greatest of all crimes; it is murder and creating mayhem for no other reason than a desire to achieve some political objective or change in policy. That is the terrorist's justification for the wanton violence which kills innocent men, women and children not only in Northern Ireland but on the mainland.

Therefore, we are justified in bringing all our resources to bear on the problem of terrorism. So far, we have not done so. However, I say that knowing that in recent years and certainly recent months additional resources have been made available to deal with the problem. I believe that recent measures will be effective in due course. The measures that have been taken cannot necessarily be revealed, but can it be denied that the prevention of terrorism Acts are one of the legislative weapons that must be used in the battle? There are many others.

I support a measure that has always been rejected when I have put it to the Government. I believe that once a terrorist is convicted the appropriate punishment for him is imprisonment for the duration. It should not be a limited term—five or 10 years or whatever—so that he may go back out on the streets and commit his offences again. I am sure that the proportion of recidivists in the terrorist population is higher than among ordinary criminals. Such a measure seems only common sense if we are to tighten up our anti-terrorist laws. Let the terrorist who has been convicted of terrorism stay in prison until all terrorism comes to an end. I can think of no more effective way of ensuring that it does.

One must also accept that there is much support for the political objective of the terrorists in the island of Ireland. Unfortunately, that is why there is no consensus between the two sides of the House about the ways in which to tackle terrorism. There is so much support that devices such as this legislation might not be effective. Political measures have to be taken. Otherwise, the problem might remain with us. There will always be people who contend for a united Ireland.

The Republic of Ireland makes claim in its constitution to sovereignty over Northern Ireland. We are all exercised at present by another section of its constitution which seems equally foolish and in need of revision. If the Irish Republic wanted to contribute towards peace, stability and reconciliation in Northern Ireland it would renounce the clause of its constitution which claims sovereignty over Northern Ireland. It gives spurious legitimacy to the men of violence. After all, what are those men doing? They are simply trying to achieve by force what cannot be achieved by the ballot box and democratic means.

The supreme court of the Republic of Ireland said in a recent judgment that the IRA was responding to a constitutional imperative. The Irish Republic has given support to the men of violence in Northern Ireland in that way. Of course, the people of the Irish Republic are all decent, honourable men. They do not intend these things to happen. But they do happen, and the support that the Republic gives is valuable to the violent republican movement.

Mr. Flannery: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Stanbrook: I will give way later.

We must seek a political solution. We must surely start by saying that the people in Northern Ireland who do not want to be British are entitled to go and live elsewhere. If, in the border areas, there is a sufficient majority, why should not we redraw the border so that those people who desire to be within the sovereignty of the Irish Republic are in that sovereignty? Why should not we provide generous rehabilitation grants for people who find themselves on the wrong side of the redrawn border? We must think about political solutions to problems that manifest themselves in terrorism at a price to not only Ireland but the areas covered by the Act.

It is appalling that the Labour party has made no sensible, civilised contribution to the argument. I should be glad to see the Labour party voted down in every constituency in the general election because it appeases terrorist violence.

5.47 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I start by reinforcing the appreciation expressed of the excellent work that Viscount Colville's has done yet again. Whether we agree with his conclusions or not, we find the information that he provides helpful and his conclusions persuasive.

I have spoken on several of these occasions. They are always occasions for regret on two grounds. The first is the necessity to discuss terrorism yet again, which continues to cause death and misery. The second is that, unfortunately, party political differences are a familiar feature of these debates. That has occurred now for several years. Perhaps I should make it clear now that I support the order and I shall advise my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote for it if there is a Division later.

When we talk about terrorists, we always try, rightly in my view, to discuss their crimes as if they were ordinary crimes committed by ordinary criminals. For they are ordinary crimes. Terrorists do not deserve the distinction of being treated by the courts as criminals in any way other than the ordinary. Murder is murder, for whatever reason

[Mr. Alex Carlile]

it is committed. When we examine how we deal with criminals, it is right that we should consider as such the form of the ordinary crime that they commit.

The House knows that I have had a reasonable amount of experience in the past 20 years of dealing with what one might call ordinary criminals. It is my experience, and that of other legal practitioners, that the usual criminal—even if he is a murderer or an armed robber—does not look beyond the moment when the crime has been completed and he has made his escape. He does not imagine that he will be caught or convicted. Appeals could not be further from his mind.

The psychology of the terrorist is different, and it is right that we should take that into account when determining what special measures outside the court system are necessary to deal with terrorism. The terrorist is trained to assume that he may be caught, and that when caught he will be questioned at great length and will be subjected to the rigorous questioning which is right and proper in respect of all serious crimes. The terrorist is trained to deal with the trial which may take place, with the tactics of defence, and, in some cases, he may well be trained to deal with the consequences, in a number of different forms, of conviction. We must bear those matters in mind in weighing the balance and considering whether it is necessary to retain the provisions for yet another year.

Also, we should all recognise that the Government have a difficult task. We have already heard from hon. Members, good democrats on both sides of the argument, who believe in the essentials of justice and security. These are surely our shared aims in this debate. There are some good democrats in the House who believe—as some Conservative Members believe—that internment would be a fair and just way to deal with the problem. I happen to disagree with that, but it is a respectably held view. There are good democrats in the House who believe that the principle of special and specific prevention of terrorism legislation is contrary to the principles of democracy which we try to uphold in the House. That poses a serious dilemma for the Government, and one must be reasonably sympathetic towards the ordeal of solving it.

Of course, we must all share the aspiration of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) that it should become easier to convict terrorists in our courts. However, I would ask him how we are going to make it easier to convict terrorists without diluting the standard of proof which we adopt or reducing the quality of evidence which is acceptable in our courts.

Mr. Hattersley: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlile: I shall give way when I have finished this point. I remind the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook that, whatever happens during interrogation when someone is detained under the prevention of terrorism Act, evidence obtained as a result is most unlikely, in modern times, to be admitted in a subsequent criminal trial. Judges are unlikely to admit evidence which does not comply in quality with the standards of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. Under section 78 of that Act, the judge has residual discretion—which is usually exercised in such circumstances—to exclude the evidence. I share the aspiration of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, but he has not told us how he will achieve it.

Mr. Hattersley: The hon. and learned Gentleman has answered his own question. I was repeating the argument made by the chairman of the Bar Council—it was also argued in the letter from the commissioner—that there would not be sufficient convictions unless jurors and courts were convinced that the available evidence had been properly obtained. The point that the hon. and learned Gentleman has just made is the one that I want to be reinforced.

Mr. Carlile: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. However, it follows from his argument, and from the point that I sought to make, that many terrorists will pass unconvicted and uncharged because of the quality of the preparation of their crimes. They are often arrested under the prevention of terrorism provisions when, at worst, they have been involved in inchoate crimes and it is impossible to pin any specific offence on them. Unfortunately, the law is inadequate to deal with that sort of problem.

It is encouraging that there has been less use of exclusion orders as far as Northern Ireland is concerned. It is a matter of real concern that there appears to be an increase in international terrorism, which is reflected in the increase in exclusion orders relating to international terrorism. I hope that the Government will continue to tackle that problem through international co-operation, which remains extremely important in driving such terrorism away from our shores at least. We have a legitimate interest in driving it elsewhere. We hope that others who co-operate with us in the international effort will ensure that it is driven into those places from which it cannot escape to perpetrate its dreadful activities.

The issue before the House is how, when balancing difficult conflicting interests, and bearing in mind the concern that we all have for justice and security, do we produce a practical solution which meets the twin requirements of public safety and public confidence overlaid, as ever, with the need for justice and security? There may be better ways to supervise detention orders. I think that putting them before judges sitting in chambers is the wrong way to deal with it and I am sympathetic with the judges on this issue. I understand that judges who had to deal with applications for internment orders, when they were in force, found that the type of evidence that they were asked to consider was difficult to deal with, not because the allegations made were unjustified but because they were unused to dealing with that type of evidence. Better protection is provided if one controls the circumstances of questioning and if outside, independent review is available on application, as is currently the case.

I do not share the fear that the tape recording of interviews during detention necessarily represents a danger. If tape recordings could be used as evidence for one side or the other in any criminal proceedings which subsequently ensued, that danger might arise. However, the Government would be entirely justified in introducing standard tape recording for all interviews of the type that we are discussing, and in introducing statutory rules so that those interviews could never be used as evidence in ensuing criminal proceedings. That would not mean that evidence obtained as a result of them could not be used, as it is already. However, it would be in the public interest

that those interviews should be excluded from the court: otherwise, there could be a danger that they might be used by members of the public who were listening to the evidence in the court.

I know that a number of other hon. Members want to speak, so I shall not take up any more time. We hope that next year, the year after or soon after we will be able to say that prevention of terrorism provisions are no longer needed. It has not happened yet. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook knows that I have a great regard for him, but I fear that we heard him make a speech that he did not want to make. If a Labour Government were elected, they would have considerable difficulty with this matter. Indeed, I suspect that they would feel compelled to change their view.

5.58 pm

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): I regret that this is the first time that I have participated in the debate on the renewal of the powers in the Act. I am grateful to follow the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), who, with his ever-present legal knowledge, has dissected some of the problems occasioned by bringing terrorist crimes to court. I shall consider the issues from a broader platform without, I hope, straying out of order.

I accept that the PTA was introduced in a rush and was designed as an anti-IRA measure. It defined terrorism almost exclusively as the particular problems caused by that organisation in the United Kingdom. The Act was introduced to deal with such problems. It contains powers, which are broadly acceptable, to detain, to proscribe certain organisations, to exclude, and to control movements; and, as a consequence of all that, it aims to deter.

In the application of each of those elements of the Act there have been difficulties. It is not unreasonable for the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) to say that the Act suppresses more than it prevents and that perhaps, from time to time, it has not suppressed terrorism either. However, the degree and temperature of suppression have altered from time to time.

The issue today is different. Terrorism has become an international cancer and has required and obtained co-operative efforts on the part of police forces through international joint detection. Terrorism requires large amounts of finance and covert activity by those prepared to connive with its objectives. Terrorism hides behind the cloak of pseudo-political respectability and, it has been said that it pursues aims that cannot necessarily be achieved by the political means available at any time.

It is its political objectives which make terrorism different from the ordinary range of crime, which was considered by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery in his discussion of applications of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

The political credibility, or otherwise, of terrorism has undergone a significant change in recent years. The threat posed by so-called middle eastern terrorism has been reduced considerably. Certainly, the threat to capture hostages has receded during the past 12 months, not always for political reasons although political machinations were involved. The tide of the terrorism in the middle east has ebbed and it is no longer the necessary card to play. The threat from continental terrorist groups, be they the Red Brigade, the Red Hand or ETA, has also ebbed. That may not be the result of legislation such as this, but that threat has ebbed. The crucial factor has been the withdrawal of public support and the reduction in the numbers of those willing to connive with the terrorists, hide them, finance them and supply the weapons of destruction so essential to them. Public opinion in most of the world has moved against such vicious activity.

The debate does not deal with matters such as internment, nor should it. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is, as ever, in his place. We have to consider how far we can go with the orthodox route of bringing terrorists to justice before considering the unorthodox. I doubt whether the terrorist movement can be wholly subservient to the rule of law, but we have always regarded the rule of law as an essential weapon with which to bring the terrorist to book.

If the terrorist is professional, proficient and trained in his particular vicious form of behaviour, he has already moved way beyond the ordinary legal system. We already have the Diplock courts in the Province, which demonstrate that the terrorist is treated as a special case when tried there. That is why we are now discussing the renewal of the prevention of terrorism Act in relation to terrorists who seek to enter the United Kingdom and those who are found here.

We have been extremely concerned in this debate about the minutiae relating to the application of the principles enshrined in the Act in terms of so-called forensic evidence produced for a jury in a British mainland court. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery said that it would be extremely difficult to obtain a conviction under the full panoply of PACE if the terrorist were in the dock. He is probably right. Convictions against various groups who were brought to court in previous years—in the Birmingham case, the Guildford case and, to a large extent, the Maguire case—have been found to be without adequate foundation. How can we say that the rule of law has been effective even when it has been applied here and in circumstances less pressurised than those that exist today?

My right hon. Friend should be aware, however, that there is no question about the necessity for the PTA. We must ensure that we can use every weapon in the panoply of weapons against the insidious crime of terrorism. Such legislation must be in place and, if necessary, renewed year by year.

The climate of opinion is now looking beyond the PTA and even beyond the courts—it has become proactive rather than reactive. If detention were introduced in the Province for a time, I do not believe that that would produce the same violent reaction in the United States as it did many years ago. I do not believe that it would result in the same sharp rise in contributions to Noraid, and I do not believe that its introduction would have quite the same impact across the border in the Republic.

There has been a massive change in public opinion in the Republic about the IRA. How good it was that it could not hold its Ard Fheis in what it traditionally regarded as its rightful venue. How good it is that the general performance of Sinn Fein in the Republic has commanded less than 2 per cent. of the popular vote at general elections. Public support for the IRA has gone right down, and there is a greater realisation that to deal with the cancer that is embodied north and south of the border may require a different attitude to the niceties of the rule of law.

[Sir Giles Shaw]

The climate of opinion is such that a more positive attitude towards detention would be perfectly acceptable. Such thinking certainly did not exist a few years ago.

I remind the House that terrorism today is an international problem. It is a cancer in many countries, and in each it depends upon public support of one kind or another. That support in terms of access to funds, training and weaponry has waned greatly. It may well be time for a brave new initiative on this matter.

6.9 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I accept the sincerity with which all hon. Members who have spoken have approached the problem of terrorism in Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom generally. However, we differ on how the problem should be approached.

The re-examination of the Act must be done in several contexts. First, we must assess the balance between the deprivation of basic rights within the law and the need to prevent further terrorism. Secondly, there must be a balance between the effect on the judiciary and the effect on the body politic. If a law is so draconian in its nature and application that it drives a population away from supporting that law, or from supporting the agencies that implement the law, a negative situation results.

I assume that the purpose of this debate is to assess all the contributions made with respect to the maximum of justice and the safeguarding of the rights of the individual before the law, paying constant attention to the need for political progress and dialogue. That is why it is a great pity that an opportunity has not been taken to look seriously at what the effect has been in the lifetime of the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1974 and examine those parts of it that statistics and comments clearly show are not doing the job for which the Act was intended.

I was not a Member of Parliament when the legislation was enacted. However, irrespective of the fact that some hon. Members warned about the possible consequences, it is important that the Act is examined to avoid the alienation that might take place, and to avoid the unnecessary withdrawal of human rights in a situation where terrorism has become endemic, as it has for the past two decades.

I represent a community which has suffered most both from Provisional IRA and loyalist terrorism. We have been the recipients of both sides of the sword. We are constantly visited by the terror of the Provisional IRA and the paramilitaries. We are also visited, willy nilly, by the consequences of the PTA in our homes and our communities. The enforcement of the Act deprives us of the protection that people normally have for their homes and their families.

The Act is a broad weapon and is not selective in any way. If a housing estate in my home town is cordoned off and searched from beginning to end, that must mean that the vast majority of the people living there are innocent. Yet they suffer alongside those who are guilty. Many people will accept that up to a point, but, beyond that point, the support is lost and thus the thrust of what the Act is intended to achieve is also lost.

I wish to illustrate the problems of searching housing estates. Individual members of a family are retained in one corner of the room of their house and are not allowed to accompany the security forces in the examination of the house. In most cases that does not involve helping them to open or close cupboard doors or look into drawers. It sometimes involves considerable destruction. Some would argue that that is necessary destruction, but sometimes floorboards are pulled up. People are naturally suspicious if they are not allowed to accompany those pursuing that search because it is not unknown—I cannot give statistics—for stuff to be planted in certain places. There is, therefore, a built-in query about the need to be present when searches are taking place. Searches often take place as a result of a tip-off, many of which have proved to be malicious rather than designed to catch terrorists in the act.

One of the great difficulties with proscription is that it is totally selective. My understanding of the attitude of the security forces in Northern Ireland is that they could well do without proscription. It has been applied to the IRA, yet other organisations have acknowledged murders, extortion and all the other attributes of terrorism. Those organisations include the Ulster Volunteer Force, its pseudonym the UDA, the Protestant Action Force and several other organisations.

Proscription has a peculiar effect on the psyche of some of our people. They feel that not only does it not help the security forces, because the name of an organisation is simply changed, or, when it is executing terrorist violence, it simply uses another nomenclature to perpetrate its violence, but because it sometimes glorifies the organisation that has been proscribed. It draws in young people who see being a member of that organisation as some sort of thrill or illegality, long before they are sucked into the real violence for which they are then trained and asked to perpetrate. Therefore, that element of proscription has no meaning within the terms of combating terrorism.

Exclusion orders have also been mentioned.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I know that the hon. Gentleman does not wish to mislead the House, but he seems to say that the Ulster Volunteer Force is not proscribed. It is proscribed under this legislation.

Mr. McGrady: Yes, it is one of the three proscribed organisations in Northern Ireland. But many others by other names are executing violence on a daily basis. They are not proscribed and the security forces see no need for it.

Much debate has taken place this evening about the consequences of the exclusion orders. They have been referred to several times as some sort of internal exile. I do not know what that phrase means, but it is contradictory in terms of uniformity of rights of the citizens of the United Kingdom if people can be deported from one part to another, irrespective of what that part is. In reality, it is considered not as an internal exile but, rather, an exercise of racism. One of the major features of the exclusion orders is to give a sense of racism in the application of the PTA, which seems to be anti-Irish. It does not matter whether someone is British Northern Irish or Irish Northern Irish—they are Northern Irish, therefore Irish, and the Act will apply against them.

The statistics of people who have been detained and not excluded show that another effect is to put a black mark against them. I have known cases in my constituency involving firms with contracts in England. They have lost those contracts and their work force in England as a result

of being detained, despite the fact that they were found to be innocent. They were detained on somebody's whim without reference to a court of law. That is wrong in principle and legally. It is self-defeating because it gives ammunition to the men of violence to heighten tensions and to draw into their ranks recruits from those who have suffered from such detention.

The Home Secretary referred to the broadcasting ban. I opposed it bitterly when it was introduced in the House and it has become a total charade in Northern Ireland. I do not know whether it applies as much on television here, but it is farcical to see the Protestants or the IRA making unchallenged statements through an actor's voice, with printed subtitles, when the interviewer or a member of the political community in Northern Ireland cannot challenge them. We are at the coal face of the struggle against terrorism, both physical and political. I want to be able to use a platform, whether of the media or any other form, to argue the toss and put my case against the terrorists. I want to illustrate the evil, illogicality and fallacy of the position and policies of those trying to indoctrinate communities. The ban is preventing me from doing so. It is time my colleagues and I had our hands untied from behind our backs in terms of the political dialogue, never mind the fight against violence in the streets.

The powers of arrest and continuing detention over a number of days are symptoms of over-reaction. The aftermath is many disgruntled innocent people—and their dissatisfaction spreads among friends, families and communities—who see themselves being targeted because they are Irish and come from Northern Ireland. In a sense, it is a mini-internment.

It has been argued that the corollary of not having convictions in court must be internment. The argument is then carefully qualified by the statement that, of course, one is talking about selective internment, but all internment is selective and always has been. Someone, somewhere, says that Joe Bloggs should be interned, because of certain information. The person being interned is not aware of the charge and has no right of redress to correct the information on the record.

There is much incorrect information on people's records. Many people lose their jobs due to telephone calls to security forces alleging their involvement in terrorism. They find themselves out of a job the next day with no way of getting the job back. They have no way of knowing what they are charged with or of denying the alleged offence.

There has been a missed opportunity this afternoon. The Act was a political response to a specific occasion at a particular time in history. In the intervening years it has not received the attention and detailed examination that it required so that we could extract the bad parts and leave the acceptable parts. The Act should have been improved and changed in the light of experience, in terms of both security and policies. The Act drives people way from public support. It makes no contribution to the fight in which we are all engaged, from whichever source it comes. It is a great pity that the opportunity has not been taken today or on previous occasions to redraft those parts of the Act which have proved to be counter-productive in the fight against terrorism.

6.24 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): A sense of déjà vu descends over the seasoned debaters of the merits or otherwise of the prevention of terrorism Act. We have been through such debates before, but this time there seems to be greater confrontation and controversy than before. For my part, I do not doubt the sincerity of Labour Members' opposition to terrorism and their determination to fight it. However, I believe that they are profoundly mistaken in their line of reasoning. Here lies the acceptable and right debate.

I wholeheartedly support the renewal of the prevention of terrorism Act as long as the exceptional circumstances in Northern Ireland continue and it is necessary to have such a measure.

Three issues in Lord Colville's report deserve attention. The first relates to a number of references to international terrorism. On page 5, under the heading, "Extensions of detention", he writes:

"In England and Wales three sets of applications concerning international terrorism were dealt with by the Home Office".

Perhaps understandably, we tend to preoccupy ourselves with Irish terrorism and overlook the international dimension. Will the Minister give details about the international aspects of terrorism referred to in the report?

The second point concerns the most disturbing feature of the report: the section on terrorist finances. Last year Lord Colville referred to a "legislative shambles". This year he stated on page 15:

"The 'legislative shambles' was only enhanced by the EPA 1991 . . . I would be failing in my duty if I did not record the pessimism of police forces in all three United Kingdom jurisdictions about the usefulness of the PTA powers in relation to terrorists funds."

This section clearly demands attention.

The third issue about which I am concerned relates to the 10 pages of comments Lord Colville gives to allegations of assaults in police custody. These make disturbing reading. On out-of-court settlements of claims Lord Colville states on page 19:

"there is . . . danger that hundreds of thousands of pounds overall will be paid out without any of the actions being tried."

That undermines confidence in the RUC. He continues: "if the police are settling these cases, they are admitting ill-treatment of detainees".

This section also deserves close attention.

I believe that there has been a dimension missing from today's debate, without which our efforts to combat terrorism are weakened: the missing dimension is absence of unequivocal support from the Government of the Republic of Ireland. Without the wholehearted co-operation of the Republic, Irish terrorism is unlikely to be defeated, and that wholehearted support simply is not there.

For too long and on too many occasions, the Republic has provided a safe haven for IRA gunmen and bombers who are on the run. Its refusals to extradite have been scandalous. The Republic remains a secure operational base for the IRA. Articles 2 and 3 of the constitution of the Republic of Ireland, with their claim for Northern Ireland territory, are an intolerable affront to the United Kingdom. That scenario makes me, for one, deeply cynical of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

The question of internment is back on the agenda. The arguments against internment are well known and include

[Mr. Andrew Hunter]

the fact that it is counter productive and creates an adverse reaction. It is ineffective unless implemented on both sides of the border. It also poses the question whether we have the intelligence to pick up the right people.

On the other hand, there is an argument for internment, although I am not necessarily stating that it should be implemented. At times of heightened terrorism there is an argument for selective, short-term internment. Internment destroys the command structures, the means of communication and the logistical planning of terrorist organisations as key people are lifted. It makes life very hard for the terrorist.

I welcome the renewal of the measure, which I believe forms a central part of our battle against terrorism.

6.28 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): When the Home Secretary courteously gave way to me, he said that there had been no row between senior officials of the Home Office, led by Mr. Ian Burns, and the Metropolitan police, led by Assistant Commissioner Bill Taylor, on the one hand, and Mrs. Stella Rimington, on the other. Whether it was a row or a difference of opinion, there have certainly been consistent reports about a difference of opinion. This is a serious matter that deserves to be raised in the House.

We hear that security chiefs in MI5 are pressing Ministers to let them take over key functions in terrorist and criminal intelligence gathering from the police. The move, purportedly led by Stella Rimington, MI5's director-general designate, has provoked, if not a bitter row in Whitehall, at least a controversy over inter-service demarcation, and it has serious implications for civil liberties.

A formal inter-departmental review of MI5's post-cold war role was launched in Whitehall late last year under the chairmanship of the Home Office deputy secretary, Ian Burns. I understand that Mrs. Rimington has raised this matter with the Minister. Before anyone criticises those of us who mention her name, let it never be forgotten that, to my astonishment and that of some of my colleagues, it was the Government—no one else—who launched Mrs. Rimington with a fanfare of trumpets——

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dalyell: No; the hon. Gentleman has just come in.

I understand that Mr. Burns has held a series of meetings attended by Mrs. Rimington and other MI5 officers; by representatives of the Ministry of Defence and the joint intelligence committee which briefs the Prime Minister on intelligence matters; and by Assistant Commissioner Bill Taylor of the Metropolitan police, who is chairman of the Association of Chief Police Officers.

I understand that Mrs. Rimington and her colleagues are seeking to take the lead in mainland operations against the Provisional IRA which are now directed by the Met's special branch and anti-terrorist squad. I understand also that senior police officers believe that those demands may be the thin end of the wedge and could lead to MI5's involvement in other areas managed by the police and Customs, such as organised crime and drug trafficking.

All this has brought to a head the long-standing rivalry between the police and MI5, with senior police officers openly voicing reservations about MI5's operational competence and its lack of accountability. I am prepared to give the Home Office the name of one senior policeman who has expressed great concern about this to me.

A final decision about demarcation between the police and the security services will be taken by an ad hoc ministerial committee, including the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence. The concerns of senior police officers have been heightened by a general feeling that the future structure of the police may be on the agenda after the general election. Ministers have voiced a need to do something about rising crime and the loss of confidence in the police caused by recent miscarriages of justice.

Next month the new national crime intelligence service will begin work. Aided by a huge criminal intelligence super-computer, the service is supposed to serve various police forces and to enable the national co-ordination of information, especially on drugs and organised crime. Its constitution specifically precludes an operational policing role. If MI5 is allowed to wrest the lead in IRA terrorist work from the police, it will have full access to the computer.

Who will control the computer? A senior officer is quoted as saying:

"The outcome, if MI5 gets its way, could be the creation of a sort of FBI, but by the back door. If they get terrorism, drugs will be next."

Specialist police units engaged in anti-terrorist intelligence fiercely resent the attempted intrusion. They believe that they are the intended victims of a Whitehall operation brought about by the end of the Soviet threat and by the obvious need for a new role for MI5. That is what the problem is mostly about.

Another police officer has been quoted as saying:

"These people are often brilliant as analysts. But it is questionable whether they would do the job as the public want it to be done.."

I want it to be done—so do many of my colleagues—by a Home Office which is accountable to Parliament. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) will be the Home Secretary, but whoever is Home Secretary it is much better that the job be done by the Home Office than by those who are not accountable.

I raised the matter in this debate because it is so difficult to raise the activities of this vast organisation while remaining in order. I will keep to the undertaking that I gave to sit down at 6.35 pm. I do not raise this subject in a curmudgeonly way; I raise it in a deadly serious manner in the hope of some kind of serious answer—because Parliament deserves an answer.

6.35 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): These annual debates are always interesting and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said, it is interesting that this one has been brought forward. We welcome the chance that it offers us to discuss the prevention of terrorism. The Labour party detests, despises and hates terrorists and terrorism. We say that on every occasion we can. I am one of the few Members to have addressed a meeting in New York state which was picketed by Noraid, which was seemingly outraged that I should have the temerity to discuss democracy and how much it involves despising and hating people who use the bullet and the bomb for political gain.

This is a serious occasion because, on it, the Government traditionally ask us to suspend all the usual rules of political discourse. They ask us to suspend critical judgment on the workings of an important piece of legislation. But it is the role of Her Majesty's Opposition to scrutinise every piece of legislation that comes before this House.

It is just not good enough. My old friend the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) spoke, in one of his typical phrases, of hiding under the cloak of pseudo-political respectability. He used that phrase in a different context; I would use it to describe the dangers of the Government hiding under the cloak of respectability their ineffectiveness when dealing with terrorism.

As the Opposition, we have to look at the facts. We have to examine the success of the prevention of terrorism Act as used against terrorists and terrorism. Given the tragedies in the lives of men and women here and abroad caused by terrorism, we cannot afford to be complacent. Listening to the Home Secretary today, one would not have thought that nearly 100 men and women died by the hand of terrorists in our country last year, or that 1,000 people were badly injured by them.

Mr. Dicks *rose*——

Mr. Sheerman: I will not give way.

It is no part of the job of Her Majesty's Opposition to remain silent when the Home Secretary says nothing, as he did not today, about the Government's appalling inactivity and failure to shed new light on the problem of terrorism and how to combat it.

During the three years that my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook and I have been dealing with these matters, we have strongly appealed to the Home Secretary to the effect that the effort against terrorism has not been good enough—that we want it improved and that the PTA gets in the way of that effective struggle. The Minister of State sought to pour ridicule on the idea of all the parties coming together and saying, "How can we defeat terrorism?". We made such an offer last year and the year before, but the Minister thought that it would be ridiculous to have a committee discussing terrorism. Getting round a table to discuss a more effective way to stop death, misery and bloodshed seems a good starting point in the war against terrorism.

I do not wish to underline what the terrorists have done in too dramatic a way, but there have been 1,000 serious injuries and 100 people have died in our country in the past year. There was a rocket attack on No. 10 Downing street, and a bomb was found and, luckily, defused a few steps from the Palace of Westminster. We ask for a more effective effort against terrorism, and we have asked the Home Secretary to meet us round a table to discuss how that can be done.

The Opposition have not engaged in empty rhetoric. We have a number of proposals but, like any group sitting at a table, we do not expect to have all of them accepted. Our proposals could be effective, useful and helpful. We want to see a national police intelligence unit with an operational arm. I sympathise with my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who resists unaccountable intelligence services, but I would like to see that new force taking a new direction. Some people might call it an FBI. So be it. We need an effective national presence that could better deal with terrorism nationally and internationally.

I agree with hon. Members who have spoken about the changing nature of Europe and its borders and who have expressed the fear that, because of that, terrorism will grow strongly in some parts of the European Community. That means that there must be better co-ordination.

We defend many elements of the PTA because they are useful, but other elements are unacceptable and we want the Government to give way on those. Our offer this year about talks is even better than the one that we made last year because we know that within a few weeks we shall be in government. When Conservative Members are on this side of the Chamber, we shall invite them to join in talks because we do not want to hide behind the PTA. We want to be honest.

Sometimes hon. Members on one side of the Chamber think that they are fully aware of the opinions of those on the other side and will, therefore, disagree with them. However, when one listens carefully one finds that that is not always the case. The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) made some telling points about the myth of unity and the message that it sends to the terrorists. We are close to an election and it is easy to make cheap party political points and to say that the Opposition are soft on terrorism. That is what people call a cheap shot, and the hon. Member for Antrim, North spotted it straight off. He avoided it and put his finger precisely on the issue when he said that all the so-called unity on the PTA has not stopped terrorism in his constituency, in his part of the United Kingdom.

The Opposition will not be muzzled because the national interest and the interests of the people are too important. The only group of people who have not risen to the occasion and whose speeches have not been thoughtful, searching and honest about the problem of terrorism are those in the small group of party political hacks led by the Home Secretary.

Mr. Dicks: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it right for the hon. Gentleman to make such hypocritical points when on Friday, in my constituency, he shared the police station with a known IRA supporter?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): The hon. Gentleman is fully aware that I cannot deal with that. It is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Sheerman: To deal with that we would need men in white coats.

Conservative Members do not like our truthful message. We deserve more from the Home Secretary and the Government than the cheap political trick that they have tried to play. The British people are not daft. They can see through a Government who are desperate because their law and order policies have failed. Crime has doubled since they came to office, and their measures against terrorism are not working. The British people will not be fooled, and in a few weeks they will elect a Government who will deal effectively with terrorism.

6.46 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): The political and intellectual content of the speech by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) could be boiled down into about one minute 30 seconds. It is a pity

[Mr. John Patten]

that at the beginning of the debate 19 minutes were wasted on entirely bogus points of order. That meant that a number of hon. Members could not be called to speak. I regret that procedural methods were used to make it impossible for my hon. Friends to be called. I am extremely pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland , my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), have been in the Chamber for most of the debate. That shows the importance that they attach to the issue.

Most people who listened to the formidable speech by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will have noted that he completely and utterly destroyed Labour's case for a "Let's solve the terrorist problem by remitting it all to a committee" approach. It is clear to me and to the country that only a small number of people support the abolition of the prevention of terrorism legislation. Opinion poll after opinion poll has shown that no more than three people in every 100 who responded support Labour's policy to get rid of the PTA. The overwhelming majority of British people support the Act. I am extremely grateful for the indication of support from the hon. Members for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), who spoke for the Ulster Unionists, and for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), who spoke for the Democratic Unionist party. I am also grateful to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) for his support for the renewal of the provision.

Opposition Members who vote against the renewal of the Act will fly in the face of the general opinion of moderate, sensible people of all political parties in Britain. It will also give enormous help and sustenance to the terrorists. I hope that I quote correctly the hon. Member for Antrim, North who said that if the legislation was not renewed the wrong signal would be received throughout the United Kingdom, western Europe and the international network of terrorism, both Arab and Irish, that the House was not serious about the prevention of terrorism. Such a single, simple message would be extremely destructive.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I shall not give way.

Before I respond to the two Opposition suggestions, I must read into the record, as if I were a Democrat or Republican Senator speaking in the United States Senate, the second half of the letter from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, Sir Peter Imbert, which was partially quoted by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) who spoke about what Sir Peter said about tape recording. The commissioner said:

"The contrary view, which reflects the present position, is that the risk to life, and loss of intelligence, is so great that it would be a serious impediment to our efforts against terrorism. I am aware that this is particularly the case in Northern Ireland, and I believe that there is, understandably, very firm opposition there, on these grounds, to tape recording."

The last paragraph of the letter states:

"As mentioned above, the pilot scheme with the tape recording of summaries of PTA interviews continues, and I look forward to reaching a stage where conclusions can be drawn from this. Until we have reached that position and are more certain of the implications I believe it would not be right to pursue legislative changes. I would add that before any such change is comtemplated we should also ensure that the present judicial safeguards relating to the disclosure of intelligence information are made more robust."

Let me now turn to what the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook described as two major suggestions.

Mr. Hattersley: There were four.

Mr. Patten: I am quoting the right hon. Gentleman's words. He must read what he said in *Hansard* tomorrow.

The first, and major, suggestion was the setting up of a tribunal to review extensions of detention. There is a difficulty with that proposal. If we establish a tribunal—or any kind of judicial supervision of applications for extensions of detention—its conclusions will often be based on strong intelligence that the person concerned is actually involved in terrorism. Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House will know that that is the case, and that such intelligence often exists.

That means that the sensitivity of the information will often be such that, if the case went to a tribunal and was considered by a judge or a group of judges, neither the detained person nor his legal advisers could be given any details of that case. If we acceded to the Opposition's suggestions, there would be no proper means of representation. The judge, or the chairman of the tribunal, would effectively be sitting in an executive position, just as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary does at present: he would, de facto, be like my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Hattersley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not; if I give way, I shall not have time to answer the points that have been made.

The present system does not preclude judicial control. I think that the right hon. Gentleman missed that point. A person who is arrested under the Act has access to a solicitor, and can challenge the lawfulness of the arrest or detention by means of, for example, the remedy of habeas corpus. I should also point out that there is no quasi-judicial system in Scotland for the consideration of extensions of detention north of the border. Such extensions are considered in exactly the same way as they are throughout the rest of the United Kingdom: there is no special arrangement for Scotland.

The second major point concerned the abolition of exclusion orders. I do not think that that proposal gained much support, except from Labour Members. I know that, in his 1987 review, Lord Colville opposed such orders, and we have, of course, examined what he has said. He has suggested an alternative, to which we paid close attention: he suggested that surveillance operations could be mounted on people who would otherwise be excluded.

Currently, 91 people are excluded under exclusion orders. If Lord Colville's proposal were adopted, it would require a massive surveillance operation involving considerable use—and, in my view, misuse—of police and intelligence work that could be better turned to dealing with real terrorism on the ground. That is why we are entirely committed to fighting terrorism in the most practical way possible, and why we have not acceded to either Lord Colville's suggestions or those of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery made that point very powerfully—not in his speech, which, as

always, will repay reading, but earlier, in an intervention on the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook. He said that, if it was a case of balancing the lowering of standards of proof in courts of British law against exclusion orders, he would come down in favour of exclusion orders every time. I think that most of us who want to see the innocent declared innocent and the guilty declared guilty would agree with the hon. and learned Gentleman.

I was much taken with what the hon. Member for Upper Bann said about the messages that would be sent from the House of Commons in the event of a substantial vote against the Act. He is quite right: people would simply say, "They are not serious." That theme of seriousness was followed by all Conservative Members who spoke.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler)—who was heard with the respect with which we always listen to his speeches—began by making it clear that it would be wrong to make available, through open court or open tribunal, information that would help terrorists. He also pointed out the extreme importance of the prevention of terrorism Act to our efforts to deal with international terrorism unconnected with Ireland. That was reflected in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter); I shall write to him about the details of the point that he raised.

I do not know whether the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) was one of the last that we shall hear from him, but, my word, it was a good one. As for my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), I can only say that I welcomed his support, and his thoughtful and thought-provoking speech about setting Irish terrorism, and the problems of the security services in this country, against the changing and multiplying, ameoba-like nature of international terrorism. My hon. Friend put his finger right on the point.

The prevention of terrorism Act is the only mechanism the House of Commons has with which to enable immigration procedures to deal with potential threats of international terrorism. Apart from anything else, the Act is needed to protect the three quarters of a million Irish citizens who are living on this side of the water—within the United Kingdom itself. I believe that Labour's commitment to combating terrorism would be much better reflected in support for the Act than in suggestions of ways in which to undermine it, but such suggestions are all that we have heard from Labour Members this afternoon.

Comfortable condemnation from the Opposition Benches is not an adequate substitute for such support. Labour must weave words, of course, but it must also will the means for our security forces to deal with terrorism. To ignore the Act would be to leave a vacuum for terrorists to exploit. We must have a policy in place to deal with terrorism.

Terrorists skulk behind innocent civilians: they always have done so. The terrorist language is the language of coercion. Hon. Members representing both sides of the divide in the Province know that all too well, and I respect them and their communities for the way in which they have handled the problem. The House of Commons does not like coercion; it stands as a place of democracy. We must proceed by open debate. The terrorists are not prepared to debate, because they know that, if they did, they would lose the debate overwhelmingly. That is why they respond with the gun—with coercion in place of persuasion. Because we are a democratic society, we believe in a response that is subject to debate and to ratification by this freely elected House and regular review.

Since the Labour party dropped its support for the prevention of terrorism Act in 1983, it has spent nine wasted years, uttered thousands of words and produced not a policy but a policy vacuum within which terrorism can flourish. We spurn the Opposition's words. I commend the order to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 300, Noes 115.

Division No. 91] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney

Hayward, Robert
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Rev William
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maginnis, Ken
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Enright, Derek
Fatchett, Derek
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foster, Derek
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hume, John
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lamond, James
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McCartney, Ian
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terence
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Stott, Roger
Vaz, Keith
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 12th February, be approved.

London Docklands Railway (Lewisham, etc.) Bill *(By Order)*

Order for Third Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): May I assist the House by saying that the Chair will put separately the Questions on the London Docklands Railway (Lewisham, etc.) Bill and the London Docklands Railway (Lewisham, etc.) (No. 2) Bill to keep us in good order, but that it will be in order if hon. Members wish to relate their remarks on the No. 2 Bill to the Third Reading of the first Bill. It will also be common sense as the Bills are closely inter-related.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wish to be helpful and to seek your guidance. I have a blocking motion on two of the private Bills. Following late representations from various people I now seek leave to withdraw the motions and to allow the two Bills to have a Second Reading if that is possible.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is helpful rather at the last minute, but what he said has been noted.

7.14 pm

Mr. Neil Thorne (Ilford, South): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The purpose of the London Docklands Railway (Lewisham, etc.) Bill which, for the convenience of the House, I shall refer to as the No. 1 Bill, is to permit the building of an extension of the docklands light railway from the Isle of Dogs under the River Thames to Lewisham via Greenwich. The extension will run from a relocated Mudchute station under the River Thames as far as Greenwich British Rail station. It will be elevated through the Deptford creek area and then continue at ground level and in cutting along the valley of the Ravensbourne river to Lewisham British Rail station.

The proposed stations for the extension will be at Mudchute and Island Gardens where the existing stations will be relocated; Cutty Sark, Greenwich where there will be an interchange facility with British Rail mainline services; Deptford bridge, Elverson road and Lewisham where, again, there will be an interchange with British Rail mainline services.

Both Bills are promoted by London Regional Transport. The No. 1 Bill was deposited in November 1990 and the London Docklands Railway (Lewisham, etc.) (No. 2) Bill in November 1991. The powers of London Regional Transport are set out in the London Regional Transport Act 1984, section 2 of which states:

"It shall be the general duty of London Regional Transport, in accordance with principles from time to time approved by the Secretary of State and in conjunction with the Railways Board, to provide or secure the provision of public passenger transport services for Greater London."

The Act also confers the power to promote Bills.

Improving public transport accessibility is an essential requirement of the redevelopment process which is now well in hand in docklands. The initial railway legislation, authorised by the London Docklands Railway Acts 1984 and 1985, empowered London Regional Transport to construct the first stage of the docklands light railway from Tower Gateway to the Isle of Dogs and Stratford. London Regional Transport then obtained powers in the London Docklands (City Extension) Act 1986 to extend the railway from Gateway to Bank.

Further extension was put in hand by the London Docklands Railway (Beckton) Act 1989 which authorised the extension of the railway from Poplar and Beckton and, most recently, the London Docklands Railway Act 1989 authorised further works at North Quay in response to the continuing expansion of the docklands light railway network, emphasising its central role in the continuing development of the docklands area.

The two Bills will authorise the next step in the development process which will help equip London for its role as a major world city. The development of docklands is a remarkable phenomenon. After years of stagnation and decline, the designation of the Isle of Dogs as an enterprise zone, the establishment of the London Docklands development corporation, the continuation and further expansion of the docklands light railway and a programme of road improvements have transformed docklands.

However, the transformation is not yet complete. In 1988, London Transport and the London Docklands development corporation carried out a study of the public transport needs of the docklands area entitled "A Transport Strategy for Docklands". It identified a number of rail projects needed to support the development.

The extension of the docklands light railway to Lewisham was one of the schemes proposed by the study. The Lewisham extension seeks to fill as yet unmet needs in the transport network of docklands, Greenwich and Lewisham. Its primary role is to link the large residential areas south of the Thames to the growing development areas to the north and it will also provide alternative access to the City from the Greenwich and Lewisham areas and provide a direct link to Greenwich and Lewisham town centres from the north, greatly assisting in the improvement and development of the local community.

The area to the south of the river Thames has long suffered from being relatively inaccessible because of the barrier effect of the river. The development of many new employment opportunities in the docklands area will cause a further imbalance unless good river crossing links are provided.

The No. 1 Bill received an unopposed Second Reading in the House on 2 May. It was reported from the Opposed Private Bill Committee on 17 December and was considered, unopposed, on 15 January.

I do not intend to describe the Bill clause by clause, although the House may wish to be made aware of certain features. Although the Bills are promoted by London Regional Transport, it is intended that the construction and operation of the railway will be undertaken by the private sector. Although private sector involvement in the development of the docklands railway is well established, this is the first occasion on which the private sector will retain ownership of the works and will maintain a commercial interest in the operation of the railway after its construction.

The operator will operate the railway by means of a concession arrangement. Clause 33 of the No. 1 Bill provides the necessary mechanism for the Secretary of State to transfer from LRT to a concessionaire the functions to enable it to construct or operate, or to construct and operate, the railway extension. Such funding has the advantages of easing the burden on the public

[Mr. Neil Thorne]

purse at a time when there are many competing demands for new transport projects, and of giving the benefits from the involvement of private sector enterprise and expertise.

The need to deposit the No. 2 Bill has arisen because, since the deposit of the No. 1 Bill, clause 33 has been found to be inadequate inasmuch as it would not authorise the Secretary of State to provide for the transfer of functions to cease to have effect after a specified period or, in specified circumstances, to secure the transfer of functions back to LRT if the person to whom the railway was transferred failed to operate the railway efficiently and safely, or otherwise failed to discharge his functions properly. The No. 2 Bill addresses that aspect of the proposed arrangements and is commended to the House. Hon. Members may also wish to be aware that the No. 1 Bill is deposited with the backing of the London Docklands development corporation, together with that of the London boroughs affected.

When the No. 1 Bill was in Committee, the Government announced that they had it in mind to direct the corporation to transfer ownership of the whole of docklands railway to the LDDC. Before making such a direction, the Government consulted LRT, the local authorities through whose areas the railway runs and the boroughs of Lewisham and Greenwich through which the railway for which authorisation is sought in the principal Bill would run. The Government have not announced a decision following that consultation.

If the transfer takes place, LRT proposes that promotion of the Bill should be transferred to Docklands Light Railway Ltd, the operators of the docklands railway. Such a transfer will probably take place after the No. 1 Bill has gone to another place and until then LRT will continue with the promotion of both Bills.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Who is paying for the promotion of the Bill? Is it LRT? If it is, is it not a bit bad that halfway through the railway could be transferred to the LDDC while the cost of the Bill would fall on LRT? The fare payers of London would end up paying for it.

Mr. Thorne: The hon. Gentleman need not worry too much because I am sure that a suitable accounting procedure will be discovered for working out the costs and that that will be taken into account.

I emphasise that the decision to transfer the docklands light railway to LDDC has no bearing on the merits of the scheme. The extension will greatly improve the access to and from large parts of docklands for the benefit of residential and commercial regeneration throughout the area. I am sure that hon. Members whose constituencies will be served by the railway are well aware of the potential benefits. I believe that it is in everyone's interests for the No. 1 Bill to be given its Third Reading and for the No. 2 Bill to be given its Second Reading so that the considerable benefits will not be missed.

My hon. Friends the Members for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan) and for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples), who are not able to take part in the debate because of their ministerial office, have asked me to make clear their enthusiasm for the Bill. I am sure that the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) will make her views known in due course.

7.24 pm

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): I shall need to speak a little longer than I usually do to put the case for my constituents. I hope that you will bear with me, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I have a raging sore throat and I do not know how long my voice will last. I excuse my anti-social behaviour in spreading germs around the Chamber. My constituents are so concerned about the Bill, which they consider to be the last straw, that I feel that their point of view must be put here.

We feel that the Bill is premature. The present railway does not run properly. When it was introduced, my constituents were told that there would be a light railway which would be quiet and which would give them transport, and they welcomed it. Over four years, the railway has deteriorated so considerably that life has become a nightmare for all the people living along the railway—so much so that they have formed an organisation called Residents Against Noise and Pollution. Some 2,000 of them have signed a petition asking that something be done about the noise. The residents say:

"The noise from the DLR is increasingly affecting the lives of residents along the line. Their health, as well as their daytime performance and behaviour, is deeply affected through lack of sleep and constant noise aggression."

When the residents heard that the DLR would be handed over to the London Docklands development corporation, they approached Eric Sorensen and expressed their problems and worries. His answer was in part sympathetic, but it ended:

"Perhaps I should end with something of a warning. The noise of this railway is partly inherent to its design, construction and the type of vehicle. You will appreciate that it would be extremely expensive to put this right and it would not be easy to find the right balance between the interests of running the railway and local residents."

In other words, if it costs too much, local residents will just have to suffer. Tough luck!

People in Lewisham and Greenwich, who are probably looking forward to improved transport facilities as we did on the Isle of Dogs, should seriously consider what has happened and how the railway has deteriorated. They should also consider whether they want to support this form of transport or some other. We believe that the extension of the Jubilee line would be one solution. The East London line, which already goes across the river, could also be extended and the definite problems of south London in not having direct railway access to north London could be solved in a better way.

The Residents Against Noise and Pollution organisation says that the new sections of the railway are very noisy. The tracks are completely open from rail track level with no noise control. The interface of tracks and wheels is steel to steel.

"Being designed as a light railway system, the wheels are not of heavy steel and are much noisier than heavy steel gauge systems."

The system, although designed as a light railway, is now required to function as a major system with longer trains and more frequent services. It was designed for 1,500 passengers a day. It is planned, with the extension and with the two and three-unit trains, to carry 10 times as many passengers as planned—15,000. Clearly the railway will deteriorate much further. In four years of operation, the railway has deteriorated from being one that did not disturb people too much to one that is extremely noisy.

What will happen when it has to take a huge extra load? The metal wears out very quickly, consequently increasing noise. At a recent meeting in my constituency, officials from the docklands light railway told me, "It is bound to have worn down. After all, it has been in operation for four years." They have not yet found a quiet way of regrinding, and the regrinding will take place in two years out of every four. It is a nightmare for people living in the area.

The brakes are very noisy. Trains stop in between stations very often, so residents are submitted to brake noise not only at stations but elsewhere along the track, and at any time. The stations are basic in design and completely open and therefore any noise of trains stopping and starting spreads through the surrounding area.

Station announcements are by the tannoy system. Since its opening four years ago, the system has not yet been controlled. Announcements can still be heard in premises up to 200 yards from the station. At night, empty trains are relocated for the next day's service, so residents are subject to noise day and night. Maintenance takes place during the night, with the noise of steel grinding, ballast being shovelled, men shouting and so on. No measures seem to have been adopted to reduce noise from night works.

There is reverberation on surrounding buildings. The DLR travels through densely populated areas and very close to dwellings and high buildings. As the tracks are elevated and completely open, the noise spreads through the populated area and reverberates between the buildings, thus giving one the feeling of being in an echo chamber. The railway passes only a few metres away from many homes. At the DLR's opening, the noise problems were localised, but now they have become generalised all along the line.

I shall not continue with the list because I do not want to bore the House, but hon. Members will no doubt realise from what I have said that noise is a real problem which is getting worse and making life a misery for people all along the line. The answer from the LDDC is that it would cost too much to remedy the problem and that it is inherent in the design of the railway, and that nothing can be done. People in Lewisham and Greenwich and their representatives should be very wary about what they are getting: it may not be as welcome in a couple of years' time as it is, in theory, now.

I want to explain—I think it needs explaining—why people in my constituency feel that everything about the extension is negative. They do not want a railway that goes to Lewisham. All that the extension to Lewisham will mean is that the trains that they now catch to Island Gardens—and on which they can get a seat at present—will come from Lewisham full of people from Greenwich, Lewisham and as far away as Kent en route to the Bank. They will not even get a seat. They will have to suffer all the disruption of extra building and all the noise of an overused railway carrying 10 times as many people as it was originally planned to carry.

In 1971 the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), then Secretary of State for the Environment, flew over the area in a helicopter, and in 1979 the present Secretary of State did the same. They saw the river and saw disused docks on both sides and considered it one area—docklands. In fact, the river has always been a divide between north and south London. Any Londoner will tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that people north of the river hardly ever go south of the river. They would probably drive round Paris with more equanimity than they would try to negotiate the badly signposted area south of the river. My constituents may use the foot tunnel to cross to Greenwich, which is very beautiful, but if they want to go shopping, they go to the street markets in Roman road, Crisp street and Stratford. For their entertainment, they go to the west end—up west, as east enders call it. They have nothing to gain from an extension of the railway to Greenwich. It will bring them nothing but hardship.

My constituents are also worried that the railway is to be handed over to the London Docklands development corporation. Clearly, London Transport has made a mess of the thing. It is probably well known everywhere that the trains often break down and that one may start a journey with a child or wheelchair only to find on the way back that the lifts are not working. There are no toilets, so people coming to the arena concerts pee in people's gardens and all over the place.

People have lost their contracts and lost days at work because of the malfunctioning of the railway. The more it malfunctions, the more trains are manned by drivers instead of being operated by the computer system; and the more open it is to human error, the less safe it is. The DLR is a four-year-old baby with teething problems, and to think of extending it before those teething problems are sorted out—if, indeed, they ever can be—is ludicrous.

The record of the LDDC in responding to local people's problems is pretty bad. Take the question of television. Thousands of people in my constituency have had no television reception for years because the LDDC, being able to give planning permission in the enterprise zone and having dictatorial powers, gave planning permission for Canary wharf within about two weeks. It took less time to get planning permission for that huge developement—the largest in Europe—than it takes to get permission to put a sign outside a fish and chip shop elsewhere. No one went into the ramifications—into the effect that it would have on local people.

It is said that television reception from the BBC's Crystal Palace mast to a swathe of homes in Poplar, Limehouse, docklands, Lea Bridge road, Walthamstow, Bow, Chingford, Enfield, Waltham Cross, Greenwich, Catford and Lewisham has been interfered with. I have been working for years now to get the BBC to put a new transmitter and also to get the money for aerials. People who had indoor aerials or aerials on their roofs that functioned very well find that they no longer function. The BBC has said that people must have a good-quality wide band or group E aerial and that set-top aerials are not recommended. Yet when I went to the LDDC—which, after all, is responsible, having given planning permission without investigation—all that it would give was £50,000 towards aerials. That is a drop in the bucket.

Many people still have no replacement aerials. One constituent who had the money to spare spent £225 on a new aerial and paid her licence fee, but her television is still not working very well. Pensioners—the people who need television most—cannot afford it. People are very worried about what will happen if the LDDC takes over the railway system, given that they found it so unresponsive to public concerns over television aerials.

The LDDC is supposed to consult the Dockland Forum—a body made up of a large number of community groups in docklands. Yet this year it has withdrawn the funding from the Dockland Forum so it will probably go

[Ms. Mildred Gordon]

out of existence. So much for the LDDC carrying out its statutory obligation to consult. We do not feel that things will go well if the DLR is transferred to them.

My constituents have put up with the noise, dust and dirt from work on the existing railway for years. Now they are asked to put up with it for another three years. One of the parks that will be affected, Millwall park, still has debris from the original railway; Mowlams has not yet removed it. The changing rooms, showers and so on have never been put back into action. People are understandably cynical about promises to carry out repairs and restoration given what has happened in the past.

Our opposition is not root-and-branch opposition to the extension of public transport south of the river, but we do not accept that the DLR is the correct means of transport to adopt or that the Bill is the correct vehicle to enable it to be extended. We do not accept that railways should be privatised by private Bills. That has happened too often. Some of my constituents worked in Tilbury and saw the Tilbury docks privatised by private Bill. I suppose that British Rail could privatise itself in the same way, but it does not seem to me a fair or correct system.

The Bill presupposes a tripartite structure. It gives parliamentary authority and outline planning permission for the construction of the works specified and the deposited plans within the lines of deviation. The railway will not be built or run by the promoters.

The second part of the structure is the agreement which has not yet been published. That is called the concession agreement. It will enable the unnamed purchaser of the railway to design it, build it, operate it and make a profit from it. The third part is the No. 2 Bill to enable the powers of the promoter to be transferred to the concessionary company.

The concession agreement will not be laid before Parliament. We do not know what is going to happen. That is one of my main objections to the Bill. All the important details will be covered by the concession agreement. We do not know what the design will be and we do not know what the concession agreement will say about safety issues. We do not know what it will require in terms of fare structures, and we do not know what service will be required of the operator of the railway. We simply know what London Regional Transport says its position is, or was, in relation to the negotiations on the concession agreement.

There is nothing to stop the promoter from conceding points to the concession company and surrendering important points on those issues later. Parliament is being asked to approve a blank cheque.

The Bill went through Committee on the understanding that the promoter was London Regional Transport. We now know that the docklands light railway will be operated by the LDDC. However, we do not know what the LDDC will require and what commitments made by London Regional Transport will be picked up by the LDDC. As I have said, the record of the LDDC among my constituents is not good. It is over-bureaucratic and unresponsive to the needs of local people. It is not consulting properly.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend is making an important point. The railway is effectively being privatised by a private Bill. Will my hon. Friend consider the procedure because clearly that action is an important political step by the Government who are privatising the railway and handing it over to the LDDC? Is that the right method? Will she comment on the process of the Bill being presented by London Regional Transport and then the LDDC taking over the railway? The LDDC will be accountable to no one with regard to its running of the railway. Any future plans that the LDDC may have for the railway might be outside the rest of the rail and tube network.

Ms. Gordon: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is pernicious and creeping development that things are being privatised by private Bills. It is absurd to hand the railway over to the LDDC, which is supposed to be wound up in a few years' time and which has no knowledge or experience of transport. We have no idea what will happen or what the final result will be. We have no control over what is happening and, as I said before, Parliament is being asked to sign a blank cheque.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Before my hon. Friend proceeds with her speech, in which she is providing invaluable information to the House, will she elaborate on the question of consultation? I had not realised that there was an element of privatisation involved in the issue. Are my hon. Friend's constituents and other people aware of that?

Ms. Gordon: There have been meetings, but the question of privatisation has not been raised. People were more worried about the loss of amenities, the noise, dirt and what would happen to the park. They were concerned more about the noise of the existing railway and whether that would be worse. They were also worried about the LDDC controlling the line.

Hon. Members may not be aware that a further 1,000 of my constituents, as with RANAP—Residents Against Noise and Pollution—have organised themselves into SPLASH—the South Poplar and Limehouse Association for Safe Housing. They are suing LDDC because their lives have been blighted. They are surrounded by dirt, dust, noise and pile driving. They cannot cross the roads and local businesses are failing. I entered a local pub the other night and it was empty. The owners can no longer prepare food because the dust in the kitchen is uncontrollable. There are dust storms in summer and mud in the winter.

I have been told by people at the local medical centre that it treats more than two and a half times the number of asthma cases that it would expect. In addition, the nurse at the centre now devotes all her time to treating asthma patients and, in particular, children. Those cases are extremely difficult to manage. They cannot be managed with the usual inhalers. The nurse has told me that some asthmatic children wear masks in the local school. That is shocking.

Our community is expected to put up with all that. The developments have been carried out, but the needs of the community have not been considered. Canary wharf was planned when it was clear that the required infrastructure was not in place. Everything has been piled on at once and people are screaming for help.

A simple amendment to the Bill could impose a stringent requirement, but London Regional Transport has refused to concede it. The Bill allows the railway to deviate upwards to whatever extent is found necessary or

convenient except where it is constructed in a tunnel. "Constructed in tunnel" is defined in clause 2 as excluding any cut-and-cover tunnel. Where the railway line passes through Millwall park there is a cut-and-cover tunnel. The Bill as drafted will allow the eventual contractor of the works to build the railway line at ground level despite the numerous and voluble statements by London Regional Transport that it intends that the railway should be in a cut-and-cover tunnel. If that is the intention, and if LRT is not going to allow the eventual contractor to construct that part of the line in some other fashion if it is cheaper, why cannot LRT bind the construction company to build it in a cut-and-cover tunnel through a clause in the Bill?

We are not convinced that the promoters' statements will be adhered to. We do not know the identity of the concession company that will eventually build the railway line.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend is making the serious point on behalf of her constituents that the line should be in a cut-and-cover tunnel rather than on the surface which would cause a lot of problems. Is not the arrangement whereby LRT presents a Bill which is then taken over the LDDC appalling? London Regional Transport will have no responsibility other than to present the first half of the Bill. It will set out the cheapest proposals that it can get away with. It will not accept clauses that care for the environment for which my hon. Friend and her constituents are arguing. At the end of the day, LRT will have no responsibility. Halfway through, the LDDC will take over. Is that not one reason why the environment is so neglected and why the procedure whereby control will pass from one organisation to another should not be allowed?

Ms. Gordon: I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution. He is absolutely correct.

The company that will build the railway will do so for profit—for private gain—not for public good. That will be the driving motive, and that is what we have been suffering from all along since the setting up of the LDDC and the unleashing of market forces.

Mr. Cryer: Does my hon. Friend agree that, if the safeguards that she is seeking were in the Bill as a legal requirement, and that if her constituents did not have to depend on a generalised statement from administrators from time to time, she would be in a much better position to assure her constituents that the problems that they face would be diminished and removed once the Bill was passed? What my hon. Friend is seeking is a better Bill with adequate safeguards written on the face of it. General support for railways is shared by my hon. Friend and myself, but we cannot pass Bills that do not provide proper safeguards.

Ms. Gordon: Together with local residents, representatives of community groups and local councils, I have met London Transport representatives, the promoters and the Minister of Transport twice. He kindly viewed the area. I have said that the bottom line is that, if we have a guarantee in the Bill that it would be a cut-and-cover tunnel and that some money will be put up for a community trust to compensate the community for the serious loss of facilities and for the noise, dust and tensions and so on that will continue in the area which has had just about enough already, we would then reconsider our attitude to the Bill, but nothing of the sort has been forthcoming. We have not been told to get lost—everybody has been very polite—but the final effect is, "Get lost."

We do not know what concession company will eventually build the railway. However, we know that the only limitation on what it can do will be imposed by the LDDC. We have absolutely no faith in the LDDC imposing satisfactory constraints. Its track record on planning decisions such as Canary wharf, the television issue that I mentioned and many other matters which I do not have time to mention gives little cause for confidence that the interests of local people will be taken into account or regarded in any way. It has been said that the LDDC has concentrated on regenerating the land, but the community has suffered and has not been regenerated—rather the opposite; its quality of life has deteriorated. The former chairman of SPLASH said that he never would have believed that his quality of life could deteriorate so far so fast. That says it all.

If it is cheaper to build the tunnel at ground level, one can fairly anticipate that that is what the company will do. If it is cheaper to build an ugly railway at a lower price, why not? The concession company is doing it only to make money. The LDDC is only encouraging it to build the railway because it wants to get people on and off the island and to Bank, not because it has the interest of islanders at heart.

We are told that all safety issues will be dealt with in the concession agreement. That procedure is wrong. We have not been told what the concession agreement will say about safety—it has not yet been drafted. We are told that the contents of the proposed concession agreement are commercially sensitive—that is the answer we always receive when we try to get at the real facts—and cannot be released, anyway.

Mr. Cryer: Is my hon. Friend saying that the safety aspect of the railway is not yet clarified and that, when approaches are made about such safety issues being negotiated in the concession agreement, people are fobbed off by the claim that the matter is commercial-in-confidence? I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that that is unacceptable because, by and large, railway safety standards are extremeley high. One would expect the highest possible safety standards to be put down on paper and made plain for all to see—perhaps as a schedule to the Bill—so that people know perfectly well what standards will be required from the concessionaires on this important subject.

Ms. Gordon: We know that the railways inspector places some constraints on the operation of railways, following the King's Cross disaster, but those conditions are more rigorous in the case of underground stations. In particular, underground stations must be manned at all times. The station plan for Island Gardens shows that it will be placed in a deep cutting, with a railway line emerging from the cut-and-cover tunnel on one side and disappearing into a tunnel on the other side. Only the station itself will not be underground.

There was a plan to make the new Island Gardens station the deepest cutting on the line, but there was a refusal to roof it over. The reason is that an underground station must be staffed. If the station is not roofed over, staffing costs will be saved. We know that that decision, for

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instance, is generated not by safety considerations but purely by cost. Safety, particularly in Island Gardens, is a major issue. The station will be in the middle of a park. The railway does not run after 9 o'clock at night, but I presume that it eventually will. In winter it gets dark much earlier. That is a potential risk for women, and in the present climate, unfortunately, for Asians, particularly late at night.

Although we have asked the promoters to make the station an underground station with staff present, we get nowhere; they absolutely refuse. The present Island Gardens station is used—it is by the road—but the new Island Gardens station, which will be located in the middle of the park, will not be much used after dark. People, especially women and members of ethnic minorities, will be afraid to use it. That is another factor that we are not pleased with.

Mr. Cryer: Does my hon. Friend recall that the very arguments that she is now advancing were raised during the passage of the British Railways (Penalty Fares) Bill and the London Regional Transport (Penalty Fares) Bill? Both bodies seek, and in the case of British Railways, I regret to say, have obtained, authority to substitute ticket machines for people. People can give help and guidance, assist mothers with young children, and assist disabled people rather more effectively than a ticket machine can. When people are in peril late at night, either because of racist attacks or because of attacks on women, the most vulnerable among our community, they will find no help because there are no staff at such stations. My hon. Friend is right to pursue the matter. I am astounded that any organisation should resist such claims today.

Ms. Gordon: I agree with my hon. Friend. The fact that they are replacing a usable station with what will be an unusable station in the middle of a park after dark is cause for concern, and it need not be if the promoters put a roof over it and spend money to have some railway staff present, but they will not do that because it is all on the cheap. The interests of the community come last. It is really a business railway to carry people in business hours; it is not to serve the community. That is the whole point.

Construction practice requirements will also be in the concession agreement. The local authority has limited powers to deal with noise and pollution infringements, but the precise standards which are acceptable will be contained in the concession agreement. Again, we have London Transport's views on what those levels should be, but they will still be subject to negotiation with the company that eventually constructs the railway. London Transport says that it will impose the same requirements on noise pollution that were imposed when the railway was first built. That has led to numerous complaints, with thousands of people demonstrating that the standards were not acceptable and that they are deteriorating very rapidly, even with the present figures relating to use of the railway, let alone the 10-fold increase in usage. The Bill could require acceptable standards out in the open now, but the promoters will not write in the standards. Once again, that makes us cynical and we feel that we cannot be certain about what is likely to happen.

Mr. Cohen: Does my hon. Friend think that the line will be for business men and civil servants or a cattle truck for the typists and everyone else? Obviously the Government are into two-tier railway and tube systems. Which will this line turn out to be?

Ms. Gordon: I suspect that the business men will still roll up in their Rolls-Royces, if they can get round the traffic. The railway may well be a cattle truck line. That remains to be seen and depends on the amount of use of the railway and the frequency of the trains.

The noise levels generated by the railway in operation will also be the subject of negotiation on the concession agreement. The existing railway is noisy and disturbs the residents who live close to the line, so my constituents and I believe that the Bill should specify acceptable noise levels. The fact that the Bill does not deal with all the points that I have raised, which are essential to the community, makes it impossible for us to support it.

My constituents who have complained about the noise have found out that it has been possible to adapt the track so that the trains glide through Canary wharf silently. Full remedial action has been taken using Koln eggs and perhaps other equipment about which I do not know too much. One of the petitioners against the Bill, whose house faces a section of the railway which is extremely noisy, has been told that it is technically impossible to install the same equipment at the extension section near his house. Yet where it is necessary for business in Canary wharf, the trains glide through. When they go through the residential areas they clatter, bang and screech and people have to live with it.

Enforcement of the construction requirements and noise limits will be up to the promoters—the LDDC. Only they will have the power to enforce the contract which the operator of the railway enters into.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend said that the promoters of the Bill were the LDDC. In fact the promoters are London Regional Transport. So who will enforce the contract? Will it be the LDDC? Or will the LDDC say that it is the responsibility of LRT? Or will LRT say, "No, it is the responsibility of the LDDC"? The procedure is a mess. We need to be clear about who will have responsibility for the contractors. The sponsor should tell us that.

Ms. Gordon: The promoters are the LDDC because we are told that the railway will be transferred to the LDDC. The Government were unhappy about the way in which London Transport ran the railway—or failed to run it properly. Their solution is to hand it over to the LDDC. That will be a case of out of the frying pan into the fire.

We have no faith that the LDDC will enforce the contract that the operator of the railway enters into.

Mr. Cohen: We must clarify this point. Who will issue the contract in the first place? As the Bill is an LRT Bill, will LRT give out the contract in the first place? If so, and if LDDC takes over subsequently, surely LRT will not have powers to enforce the safety arrangements. Is there not a possibility of a muddle in this respect?

Ms. Gordon: There is a great possibility of a muddle. It will depend on how quickly the railway is handed over to the LDDC and whether it is handed over. As the Minister has told me that it will be handed over, I assume that that is right. So we have to assume, perhaps wrongly, that the LDDC with the local authority will have whatever limited powers are made available for controlling noise pollution.

The position is unclear and obviously unsatisfactory. The stations have not yet been designed. Again, that will be left to the concession company. We are in the dark about so much. Millwall park, where the works site will be, is valuable to local people. They do not want an ugly station built in the middle of it. I must describe the area to the House. There is little green space for the whole dense area. Some of it is near the Thames. Millwall park is much beloved and much used. A large part of it—about a third—will be used as a works site. There will be a great wall around the site and noise, dirt and dust will probably fly over the walls. So a good bit of the park that is left will not be usable either.

A small part of the park will be taken away permanently. The piece of land that has been offered to replace it is not satisfactory to my constituents. They do not feel that it is sufficient compensation. My constituents will lose the use of the park, the football pitches and various other facilities at the park for three whole years. In my opinion, they will also lose the use of Island Gardens. Apart from a little pocket handkerchief further up the Isle of Dogs, Island Gardens is the only nice bit of riverfront that ordinary people can look at. Perhaps people in luxury flats and those with an office in Canary wharf can see the river, but Island Gardens is the only place that ordinary residents can enjoy.

Barges to take away the spoil from the tunnel will start at Island Gardens. An eight-foot fence will have to be put up. The beauty of Island Gardens is that one can see Greenwich from there. One can see the Wren complex and all the other beautiful buildings of Greenwich. It is a lovely view. Residents will not be able to enjoy that for three years.

The conveyor belt to take away the spoil will be very long. It will be high in the air—high enough for a double decker bus to go under it. It will go right across into the park at Island Gardens to the river bank where the spoil will be taken away. Even if the conveyor belt is covered as promised, it will be noisy, dusty and dirty and it may operate 24 hours a day. It will pass by George Green school and the community sports grounds, with tennis courts and football pitches used by the school and the local community. I consider that they will all be unusable.

Some beautiful plane trees will be lost. The area is a conservation area, so the trees are protected, but they will probably have to come down. I am not even sure what will happen to the entrance to the lifts to the foot tunnel to Greenwich if it is in the way of the works.

My constituents will lose the use of Millwall park. They will lose some land permanently. They will lose the use of Island Gardens. The football club that plays on the sports ground will have to go miles away to the north of the borough. That will involve travelling time and fares and the club will probably dwindle. It was not unreasonable that we asked for money to be put into a community trust handled by representatives of the community to replace lost facilities and as compensation. At present only landowners directly affected by the Bill will receive compensation. Everyone else can whistle. I believe that the community is an entity and that it deserves some compensation. My request for a community trust was not unreasonable.

The Mudchute will also be affected. It is unique. London Transport seems to regard it as merely a bit of waste ground, but it is not. It was made by mud dredged from the docks. It is perhaps the largest farm in any city. It has flocks of sheep and one can see horses grazing there. The effect on the Mudchute will be severe, as its western bank, an important part of the area, will be taken up by the development.

Horse riding has always been a popular activity on the Mudchute and the income which it generates has become ever more important in the overall budget. In September 1991, new stables were opened. They were built at a cost of £617,000, with funding largely from the LDDC. It was obtained because it would generate more income from the area. It was realised that if the Mudchute could offer hacking it could significantly increase its income and fund other activities. The farm circulated businesses in the area to tell them that it would be able to offer hacking. The plan was to develop a ride around the Mudchute and Millwall park, but that will now be blighted.

The Mudchute contains some buildings—classrooms which local teachers use for science lectures as part of study for the science curriculum. The children use trees for bark rubbings and they count the age rings. The elder trees along the southern and western edges are important because they provide examples of trees which have established themselves naturally, without deliberate planting. They will go.

The trees provide shelter and nesting sites for birds such as starlings, whitethroats, swifts and linnets. Further planting at the western edge was expected to attract a greater variety of birds, which are essential to wild animal and bird activities for the children who examine birds through binoculars, learn to identify and observe the different breeds, and make tally sheets and field sketches. I cannot tell hon. Members how important that is to children who grow up in a densely populated urban area. It is their little piece of the country, and it will be encroached upon.

The thicket area provides a rich source of food for birds, such as loganberries, blackberries, thistles and dog roses. It is a hiding place for wild animals such as voles, fieldmice, foxes and hedgehogs. Children follow animals footprints, track them and make plaster casts of their prints. All sorts of educational activities take place.

The Mudchute contains about 21 different species of butterfly—perhaps the greatest number for miles around. Much of the information that I have been given by Mudchute farm is very technical. The banks of the Mudchute provide an island for rare insects and rare species to live and to develop. The flowers and small beasts which enjoy that south facing bank are important to the children's scientific and nature studies.

The Mudchute has a livestock husbandry system. The stock is allowed occasional access to the area which will be taken away, so that it can benefit from the flora found there. Some highly palatable grasses such as timothy and coltsfoot are to be seen in abundance. That makes a rich pasture for sheep and goats. The well-established trees in the area provide cover for livestock in bad weather. It is a source of great concern that that area will no longer be available to the livestock. In addition, it is felt that a considerable area bordering the site will also be lost to grazing and not merely the part where work is carried out. The animals will keep far away from the work, shying away from areas of excessive noise and unfamiliar sights. The security of the livestock will be placed in jeopardy while work is taking place. Although existing fencing is adequate to contain stock, new fences and gates will have to be installed immediately work commences to keep

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animals on the park and the farm. The farm feels that it would be a tragedy if it were to lose that valuable piece of grazing land.

The Minister saw the allotments, which are mostly used by old people for growing vegetables to supplement their diet. They will be affected.

I could go on for hours, but I do not want to take advantage of the House by going into a nature study tour of the area. However, it provides a good habitat for all sorts of butterflies—the wall, the common blue, the small copper and various other species which are becoming rare in this country. Twenty-one varieties of butterfly are to be found on the Mudchute. It is not merely a piece of wasteland, as London Transport seems to think.

There will be a great loss of amenities. A large part of Millwall park will be out of action for three years; part of it will go for ever, and it will not be properly compensated for. Island Gardens, where one can sit in the summer and look over the river, will be a big mess. The Mudchute will be affected, as will sports facilities attached to the George Green school.

Mr. Cohen: I listened to my hon's informative passage about the Mudchute. All hon. Members considering the Bill should bear in mind what she has said. She mentioned that the promoters of the Bill will chop down all the trees.

Ms. Gordon: No—some of them.

Mr. Cohen: They will chop down some of the trees—a great number of them—in the area. Has there been any offer to replace the trees within the vicinity? We now have much higher standards for the environment, or we should have. If trees are chopped down, they should be replaced. Have the sponsors approached her with any suggestions to replace the trees and the wildlife to which she has so eloquently referred?

Ms. Gordon: Many mature trees were planted at Canary wharf and the sponsors have promised to reinstate the park. However, since debris from the first phase of building the railway is still there and has not been taken away, and since the changing facilities have not been repaired and put back into operation we feel cynical about what will happen. We would like written guarantees, but we have not received any.

The planning authority, which will have to give planning permission for construction of the stations at Mudchute and Island Gardens, will be the LDDC. That is an unacceptable conflict of interests. The Bill gives outline planning permission for construction of stations, site unseen. The LDDC will be asking itself for planning permission, without any interference, or any responsibility to the local community. Whatever it wants to do, it will be passed automatically, without any investigation or inquiry. That is not right, especially in the light of the planning decisions which the LDDC has made in the past, with its bureaucratic powers, and in view of its insensitivity to the concerns of the local community.

Local people do not have any faith in the docklands light railway system. It was built as a tourist railway on a bus stop principle—frequent trains, at short intervals, operating more like a bus service than a railway. Some people called it a Mickey Mouse railway and, in fact, the original carriages have been sold to Euro Disneyland. The railway has not been working properly and is unreliable.

If the Government are serious about improving north-south connections over the river, we need a proper railway or an underground line. The Jubilee line will be going through eventually and at least people have faith in that. Only a crazy person would rely on the DLR as things stand. Extending the railway merely increases the opportunity for things to go wrong.

We suggest that the DLR experiment has been tried for several years and has been found wanting. Further problems will arise during the construction period. As I have said, they propose to use a conveyor to take the spoil out of the tunnel. The spoil will not go to Greenwich; it will all come to our end and our people feel that they always get the rubbish and the worst of the bargain. The conveyor runs next to a school playing field. We do not know how it will be designed, but we have fears that the design and noise will make the area unusable.

The construction period is anticipated to last three years, so when we talk about the loss of view and of the effect on our environment and so on it is not a short-term one. We also understand that, when the spoil comes out of the tunnel, it will be wet and will have to be dewatered. A local resident who has worked on the Blackwall tunnel says that the spoil will be stinking as well. That is something we have not come across yet. We have had dust, noise and dirt—dust storms in the summer, mud in the winter and pile driving. The possibility of stinking spoil fills us with horror.

Mr. Cohen: What about rats?

Ms. Gordon: Yes; they will also be a problem.

The Thames at this point is salty and saltwater will have to be removed somehow. All that we have been told is that it will be pumped into the sewers. Thames Water says that the sewers are operating at capacity already, so we want to know where the water will go. If it goes on to the park, the salinity will destroy the vegetation.

The environmental impact statement prepared in December said that that point had been taken up with Thames Water, but all we know is that the matter is being discussed. The volume and the capacity of the sewer system are unknown.

No one on the Isle of Dogs needs the railway extension. There is a groundswell of opinion that local people do not want to travel to Lewisham or Greenwich. If they want to go to Greenwich, they can use the foot tunnel anyway. It is clear that the railway is being built to enable the population of south-east London to travel on to the Isle of Dogs and many people from Kent will travel through it to the Bank. We have no wish to impede the people of south-east London travelling easily and quickly where they want to go. However, if the object of the exercise is to provide employees needed for businesses that it is anticipated will start up on the Isle of Dogs, the idea is misconceived.

Unemployment on the Isle of Dogs is already higher than it is in south-east London. The people of Lewisham and Greenwich should know that the companies that move into the developments on the Isle of Dogs usually bring their own staff. The London research centre gives Tower Hamlets as a whole an unemployment rate of 16·4 per cent. In Milwall, it is 15·8 per cent. and in Blackwall it is 14 per

cent. Other organisations put the figure at up to 24 per cent. In Lewisham, unemployment is 16·3 per cent., Greenwich 14·4 per cent., Bromley 6·4 per cent., Bexley 7·6 per cent., and Croydon 8·6 per cent.

The LDDC has not created jobs for local people, either in construction or on a permanent basis, as it was meant to do. Local businesses have gone and are going out of business because of the planning blight—I have to call it that. Now the LDDC is making alternative arrangements to assist residents from outside the borough to bypass local people when it comes to obtaining jobs, and my constituents feel that they have had very few jobs out of the developments. Therefore, they resent that proposal, too.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend referred to commuters coming from Kent, passing through her constituency and not stopping there on their way to Bank. Is she aware that a number of those living in Kent will benefit, although they will not benefit very much, from the Government's policy on the channel tunnel link? The Government changed their policy to assist those people so that their environment was not blighted by the railways which will pass through their area. They have, at least, received some help to defend their environment.

However, when it comes to constituencies such as that of my hon. Friend and mine, where the Department of Transport proposes a road scheme, the Government do not care about the environment. Is that not a double standard? Would my hon. Friend care to speculate on why the Government care for areas such as Kent but not for constituencies such as mine? Is not that political bias by the Government because they are trying to bribe some voters by protecting their environment to some extent? However, when the population does not support the Conservatives, the Government do not care for their environment and give them the worst of things. Is that not double standards and political bias and no way to run a railway?

Ms. Gordon: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is a matter of political bias. It also depends on how much clout one has. In middle class areas people have money, they can employ barristers to fight their case, and they stand a better chance of avoiding planning blight.

The people of the east end feel that others can get away with anything. The whole point is that the Government have trodden roughshod over my constituents. I am talking not just about the railway extension, but about everything that has happened since they came to office. Land has been regenerated, but the people have been persecuted by noise, dust and dirt. No one takes any notice of their interests and no one cares that the Government are breaking up communities.

My constituents feel that they have no voice, but they are learning. One thousand members of SPLASH have got legal aid to sue the LDDC for what has happened to their lives. We shall watch the outcome of that case with great interest because thousands will be affected by and interested in the outcome.

I am always in favour of improving public transport rather than building more roads that generate more cars. The docklands highway will generate more traffic on to the A13, which will become worse than ever. If the railway functioned well, if it was reasonably quiet so that people could live with it, if it could take the extra load and if we had proper guarantees, which should be in the Bill, and proper information rather than being asked to sign a blank cheque, we might have a different attitude towards it. If the community were given proper compensation, they would be prepared to put up with a lot. They are socially conscious people, good people, and if they saw the need for something and felt that their interests had been taken into account and not totally ignored they would have a different attitude. But now they are up in arms.

As well as causing the loss of amenities, the railway will cause an increase in noise, dust and dirt with deleterious effects on health, for example, on asthma sufferers, and the nerves of local people. Apart from that, however, construction of the railway would also require the diversion of the East Ferry road. That busy road is one of the most important residential roads in the area and it would be stopped up during the construction works. Anyone who wants to get around the island will face long detours. I should also mention that people can now walk across the park to the only supermarket on the island, Asda, but they will be unable to do so once the work starts.

The local population will receive no compensation for the losses that they will suffer unless the Department of the Environment has a change of heart. I assume that the DOE is the responsible Department, because I am assuming that the railway will be handed over to the LDDC. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) has said, we do not know. Whoever's court the ball is in, be it the DOE or the Department of Transport, if there was a change of heart on their part and if they gave some compensation to the community, that would be welcome. So far, London Transport has said that it will compensate only on the basis of land ownership.

The users of the park will get nothing and the local authority, as the operator of the park, is still fighting London Transport for compensation from the building of the last railway. That case will go to the Lands Tribunal. We have no faith that the compensation available will be anything other than derisory. The promoters should compensate all local residents, not just those with property immediately abutting the line, but they offer nothing. The local population has everything to lose and nothing to gain from the railway. I am therefore opposed to the Bill.

8.29 pm

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): I wish to place on record the Government's support for the Bill and recommend to the House that it be given a Third Reading. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) on the way that he presented the Bill and for his hard work in all its stages in the House.

The Government support the Bill because the construction of an extension to the existing docklands light railway to run on into Lewisham and Greenwich will provide a welcome access for the people of south London to an important employment centre in docklands. It will provide great benefits to communities that are, in many ways, economically disadvantaged and it will give them much better access. Instead of having to pass through London Bridge or Bank stations they will be able to cross directly to docklands.

In addition to employment benefits, as the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) fairly pointed out, the railway will be an additional crossing of the

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Thames. Crossings are relatively limited, even with the recent opening of the Dartford-Thurrock bridge. The railway will benefit people travelling from much further afield, including Kent.

The Government have supported the principle of the private sector designing, building and operating the extension for the simple reason that its involvement will mean that the project will be completed earlier than would otherwise have been the case. My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South clearly spelt that out in his opening speech. Without private sector involvement in the project, we might have to wait many more years simply because there are many pressing and valuable projects within Greater London, not only for London transport and British Rail but for the LDDC, which is responsible for much of the roadworks within docklands.

Mr. Cohen: We have heard all that before in relation to the Channel tunnel and the Channel rail link. The Government and the Minister's predecessors said that private finance and involvement would get those built much sooner than if the state were involved. The truth has been the opposite—the Channel tunnel will not be completed in time and the Channel rail link is well behind schedule. We have no date for its completion. Are not the Minister's words just so much hot air?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman has heard those words before and he will hear them many more times from me. The Channel tunnel project has been a remarkable success—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman would like to visit the Channel tunnel, I shall arrange it. I have walked through it and it is a miracle to behold. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would benefit from seeing what a tremendous civil engineering project it is. Moreover, it will be completed on time. The railway services through the tunnel, operated by Eurotunnel, British Rail and SNCF, may not be in operation by the summer of 1993 but they will be very shortly thereafter. The Government believe that the private sector's provision of the Channel tunnel is a tremendous achievement. I dare say that, had the public sector been responsible for financing it, it may have taken considerably longer.

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): Will my hon. Friend remind the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) that the last great infrastructure project in the public sector in this country was the Humber bridge, which ran months and months over its time and increased its cost enormously?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I hope that we shall not go around the entire United Kingdom in this debate.

Mr. Freeman: No, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall come straight back to the Bill.

We propose to transfer the docklands light railway from London Regional Transport to the LDDC. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering the representations made following the consultation procedure with the local authorities and others, and we shall reach a conclusion shortly. If it is decided to proceed with the transfer, it will be clearly appropriate to amend the Bill later in its proceedings, probably in another place, to substitute the DLR—not the LDDC—for London Regional Transport as the sponsor.

The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), in one of his several interventions, erroneously said that passengers would pay for the work that London Regional Transport will do on the preparation of the Bill and in carrying forward the project—consultation with the private sector, design work, etc. May I make it plain that the fare-paying passenger has not been financing London Regional Transport for that work. Rather, the taxpayer has been financing it through the grant mechanism. It would not be equitable to ask underground or bus passengers to pay for the work.

The hon. Member for Bow and Poplar in a very detailed speech, cited the environmental impact on her constituents. The whole House recognises that she has discharged that obligation this evening with great thoroughness. It is an important issue. I have visited her constituency with her and I agree that the construction of a new line running south through the Mudchute and Island Gardens, under the Thames to Lewisham and Greenwich, will bring inconvenience and disruption. I saw for myself the impact on the Mudchute which, incidentally, is where the contractors put the mud when they excavated the Royal docks and the docks on the Isle of Dogs. I saw for myself the allotments there and I know that there will be an impact, albeit marginal, on the Mudchute. However, Millwall park will be temporarily affected during construction and permanently by the loss of part of the park. Clearly, Island Gardens, with its most attractive view of Greenwich, the naval college and the observatory, will be affected during construction.

The conveyor belt to which the hon. Lady referred will be a visual intrusion to the residents of Island Gardens, who will suffer from the noise of construction and of the partial demolition of the old line. I do not know whether the sponsors of the Bill plan to demolish Island Gardens station but the construction of the new line will bring inconvenience. I have written to the hon. Lady and said that I understand the points that she raises and I have given her an undertaking that I will bring the matter to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, who is responsible for the LDDC and London Regional Transport.

If the transfer goes ahead, it will be a matter for the LDDC and the Department of the Environment, which is the sponsoring Ministry. The hon. Lady asked for an amenity fund and she made a powerful argument. I cannot assure her on that and she has sought none from me tonight but, having visited the site, I understand the strength of her argument and I shall discuss the matter with my hon. Friend.

Finally, you have ruled, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it is in order to comment on the second Bill. I understand that the block on this Bill has been removed. The Government also support what my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South said—it is appropriate because it rectifies a technical defect in the Bill. I commend both Bills to the House.

8.38 pm

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I begin by declaring a strong constituency interest in these Bills. As the Member for Deptford, I have supported the proposals of my local authority and London Transport and the promoters of the Bill since its early stages, and I want to put on record my admiration for the officers of my local authority who have struggled for six years to get this

package together, in support of the proposals by London Transport, and who have done a good job in assembling an impressive argument in favour of the extension of the docklands light railway across the river.

My constituency is very like that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) in that it has high unemployment—19 per cent. at the latest count and an increase of more than 40 per cent. in the past year. It also suffers from poor transport infrastructure which greatly hinders my constituents when seeking employment anywhere other than the local area. It suffers, too, from all the inner-city problems that arise, specifically from road congestion. We have air pollution, noise, environmental degradation and poor local amenities. My constituency, therefore, is in desperate need of economic regeneration. Thus it has been my view and that of the Lewisham local authority that the extension of the docklands light railway to Deptford and Lewisham will provide a vital stimulus for economic growth in the area.

The extension would also add to Lewisham's development as a major commercial and shopping centre in south London, and, with five new stations south of the river and interchanges with British Rail lines, it offers a considerable increase in the choice of public transport routes for local people.

It is not, however, as a constituency Member but as a Front-Bench spokesperson on transport in London that I ought to speak tonight. In that context, I begin with the record of the docklands light railway. It is not impressive. It was a badly designed railway, designed with a capacity far too limited for the potential demand. It was in fact another example of the Government trying to get new infrastructure on the cheap. It has not been an unmitigated success, and that needs to be acknowledged.

Many of the aspects mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar tonight give us great cause for concern. Too much noise is associated with the running of the railway; that must be put right. The railway has not been reliable; that must be put right, too. We certainly do not want an extended DLR that operates in the same way as the railway has been operating in the past 12 months.

It is our belief that the railway can be made more reliable and that it has the potential to offer a valuable form of public transport. Within the framework of a Labour transport policy for London, with a strong consumers charter, we believe that we can have an effective railway. For these reasons, Labour is prepared to welcome the extension of the DLR south of the Thames. It is welcome for strategic reasons and for providing an alternative to take the pressure off overloaded BR commuter services running into Cannon Street, Charing Cross and London Bridge. This extension will have the potential to carry at least 12,000 passengers an hour—rather more than the modest 20,000 a day envisaged for the original DLR.

The extension will create a much needed cross-river link between east and south-east London and will greatly improve links with the docklands. It is likely that many commuters using an extended DLR will transfer from their cars. That is enormously important to cutting pollution and easing road congestion. We strongly support measures that will enable people to use their cars less, and light rail is potentially non-polluting and environmentally friendly.

It is also undeniable that the DLR and its extension are fully accessible to people, including wheelchair users, with mobility handicaps. That is important to us and a considerable improvement on existing public transport services in south London. For these reasons, we support the Bill.

Before I move on to the aspect of the Bill that gives us particular concern—the transfer of the DLR to the London Docklands development corporation—I should like to refer further to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar. I understand and appreciate the anxieties that she has expressed about the amount of disruption and the loss of amenities which her constituents will suffer as a result of these proposals. She will understand that, for the strategic reasons that I have mentioned, Labour supports the DLR extension, but I assure her that I have been impressed by the force of her arguments in support of her constituents and by the case that she has made for changes in the Bill, for compensation, for action on noise and environmental damage, and for an amenity trust.

I was disappointed by the Minister's reply. Given that most of us are so anxious for the passage of these Bills, surely he could have given a more positive response so that we could have made united progress on an important public transport measure. I undertand that reference has been made to the Department of the Environment; as the LDDC is outside the remit of London Transport, I urge the DoE and the LDDC to consider these matters sympathetically. I hope that ways will be found to compensate my hon. Friend's constituents; only in that way will we all be satisfied that there is justice in the passing of these Bills.

I come now to the proposal to transfer the DLR to the London Docklands development corporation. The Labour party has long argued that there should be a strategic plan for transport in London. We have often stated that transport in London cannot be left to the operation of market forces. Private companies cannot and do not wish to pick up the responsibility for a coherent transport network in this capital city. It is up to the Government to provide that framework, and our proposals for a Greater London authority will devolve responsibility for strategic planning in transport to a Londonwide authority which is elected and democratically accountable.

Welcome though the Lewisham extension measure is, we do not feel that the Government encouraged it because of its intrinsic merits or strategic value—they did so simply because it would cost the Government nothing to let it go ahead.

Mr. Freeman: I am sure that, on reflection, the hon. Lady will agree that she did not mean that. I have often said that the docklands light railway extension to Lewisham and Greenwich has been, is and will be recognised for its strategic necessity—and for its social and economic regenerative benefits. I am sure that she will concede that the private sector has been involved in building it to advance its construction.

Ms. Ruddock: It is still our view that this should be the responsibility of the Government. If they believe that the case has been made, they ought to give it real support—and they could have. The amounts involved in this extension are very small in Government terms and, had they been given, they would have speeded this measure's passage and thus avoided forcing those who want the

[Ms. Ruddock]

railway extended to devote enormous efforts to getting together the package of private money needed to make the proposal feasible.

This is rather like the extension of the Jubilee line. Private money drove that proposal forward and created priorities for the Government. That was wrong, and it is wrong of the Government to have made it a condition that this extension should proceed only if private sector money is found. The Government have demonstrated their willingness to subjugate the needs of Londoners and London's transport to private interests. When in government, Labour will take a very different view.

We oppose the creeping privatisation of transport in London which is endemic in this proposal. The transfer to the LDDC is an outrage, and we strongly oppose it. It is merely a prelude to complete privatisation when the LDDC ceases to exist in a few years' time. When the Government first suggested making this transfer, I tabled a long series of parliamentary questions. The answers showed that the Government had no idea of the implications of the transfer. No answers were forthcoming on the fate of travelcards, on through-ticketing or on the responsibility of the LDDC for a network outside its own area. There were no answers about the role of the London Regional Passengers Committee and no replies to a list of other important questions. However, it slipped out, although it was officially denied, that 1 April might be the transfer date. There are surely serious doubts about whether such a transfer is workable by 1 April. In any event, I promise the House that a Labour Government will return the DLR to London Transport when we take office on 10 April.

There are so many concerns about the second Bill that I shall not have time to go into all of them. I remind the Minister that no answer has been forthcoming on the availability of travelcards or concessionary fares. There has been no clarification of the responsibility of the LDDC to the DLR outside its own territory, and no information on new operational arrangements for emergencies or on the quality-of-service standard. May we expect an LDDC customers charter or will we just get more roses and boxes of chocolates?

There has been no explanation of how a railway system run under the aegis of the Department of the Environment will be co-ordinated with the rest of the rail and bus networks in London. Everybody in London, with the exception of the Government it seems, thinks that there must be integration and co-ordination of different modes of transport. However, the transfer will work directly against that strategy.

We want answers to our questions, but none has been given. As the Minister has declined to give them, I hope that the promoter——

Mr. Freeman: I do not want to put the hon. Lady off her train of thought. The intention is that travelcards and concessionary fares should continue. I understand that the LDDC will ensure that the LRPC's remit runs to the DLR. No change is envisaged on any of those three counts.

Ms. Ruddock: I thank the Minister because it is useful to have such matters on record. Again, he uses words such as "intention".

Mr. Redmond: I should like to be clear about transport commitments to the elderly. Following deregulation in South Yorkshire some old-age pensioners who had bus passes were unfortunately unable to use them because of the lack of transport. It was uneconomical for the private firms to pick up elderly people in housing estates and they were left without transport for some weeks. I suggest, and I am sure my hon. Friend agrees, that if the private sector finds a route uneconomic it will certainly not wish to provide transport or service on that route.

Ms. Ruddock: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Outside London, deregulation, fragmentation and privatisation of services have resulted in the loss of many arrangements similar to the travelcard. There is no doubt in the minds of Londoners that travelcards and concessionary fares are two of the city's most important transport measures and that they are undermined by fragmentation and privatisation. That would happen with the transfer of the DLR to the LDDC. We are not impressed by the Minister's assurances, because they are not specific enough to satisfy us and are not in the Bills.

Ms. Gordon: Has my hon. Friend considered the fact that if the railway is run by a private company and proves not to be sufficiently profitable it could be closed? A fleet of minibuses on the Isle of Dogs stopped wherever passengers wanted them to, but London Transport took it over and it went out of business.

Ms. Ruddock: My hon. Friend astutely expresses my concern. We are all afraid of such measures, because experience shows that they jeopardise the provision of public services in London and put transport services at grave risk.

Mr. Cohen: The LDDC is nominally due to close its doors in a few years. Some of us suspect that it might carry on if the present Government, horror upon horror, were to win the election. In that case it might sell off this line to another private company and, presumably, the Minister's assurances will be quite worthless. Would not it be better for assurances on concessionary fares and travelcards to be on the face of the Bill?

Ms. Ruddock: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I have consistently made that point to the Minister. There can be no doubt, and the Government have not denied, that the LDDC is expected to cease to exist and that the DLR, having been passed to the LDC, would then be passed to some private company or other. In connection with the DLR, the Government's intention is privatisation. We have no doubt about that, but we are opposed to it and will end it when we come to office in the foreseeable future.

I have expressed the concerns as forcefully as possible, but I am in a difficulty. We see the need for extending public transport provision, especially south of the river. We do not think that it is right to penalise the residents of south London by holding up the Bills while we debate the ownership of the DLR. With great reservations, we are prepared to allow the Bills to proceed. We look forward to the day, in the not-too-distant future, I think, when a Labour Government will control the transport strategy for London. I assure the House and my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar that environmental considerations and safety will be given much greater

priority in transport planning than at present. They will also be given much greater priority in the day-to-day operation of our railways.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): In view of the fact that on 9 April we are supposed to have a general election, which the Prime Minister will announce two days after the Budget, having had an important Cabinet meeting, surely since Labour will win the election we need not talk about having a Labour Government in the foreseeable future because we shall have one in only a few weeks? Why can we not say that Labour will not assist to pass this Bill? We are going to win anyway, and my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) will have a meeting with my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon). We can then draw up an agenda for the necessary negotiations and consultations. Be confident. They will get kicked out of office and we should not give them any support now. Nobody will come to any harm, but the residents of Bow and Poplar will be better off because we shall take control and those residents will be able to get their pound of flesh as they see it.

Ms. Ruddock: I was trying hard to assure my hon. Friend that that was the way things would go. We want to see the Bill proceed, even though the election is only a matter of weeks away. We want to be in the business of making the adjustments and amendments and being in control of the situation. We expect to be in control on 10 April.

I have outlined the way in which, when we are in power, much more consideration will be given to environmental and safety concerns in both the construction and the design of railways. The same will apply to the day-to-day running of the railways.

Public transport must operate in the wider public interest, and must have as little impact as possible on residential areas and community facilities. That is why Government must take responsibility for transport and must be willing to use public money where necessary to achieve their objectives.

Undoubtedly, two of the reasons why there have been so many problems with the DLR are its underfunding and the Government's lack of commitment to ensuring that it runs effectively. We know that there is no bottomless pit of public money; the difference between us and the Government is that we are prepared to adopt new and imaginative ways of making limited public funds go further.

The House will know of the persistence with which my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) has pressed Ministers to allow British Rail to lease rolling stock for the north Kent line. Such arrangements would be relevant to the funding of the Lewisham DLR extension and could possibly provide the means whereby an increase in total funds could help to meet the concerns raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar.

Mr. Freeman: How does the hon. Lady expect British Rail and the Treasury to treat the finance lease that would be involved in paying for the 188 class 465 Networkers? Is she confirming that that lease would, according to standard accounting practices, be capitalised on British Rail's balance sheet and counted as public expenditure?

Ms. Ruddock: The Minister will know—because of the frequency with which my hon. Friend has made the point to him—that we believe that we can make such arrangements in the same way as continental railways. We consider that this is a way of using a capital sum to pay out a much smaller amount, on an annual basis, in a lease arrangement, rather than funding the whole amount in any one instance. The arrangement is entirely acceptable to our shadow Chancellor and—as the Minister knows perfectly well—to the chairman of British Rail. It is dependent on our changing the Treasury rules. We have said that we will do that and we are satisfied that this is a way in which we can fund the railway properly.

Let me ask the Minister a more relevant question. Why is he not prepared to allow British Rail to make such a lease arrangement? Is he as ideologically opposed to the arrangement as he has said that he is for the past 12 months?

Mr. Freeman: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Ruddock: I hope that the Minister will excuse me if I do not.

We are perfectly satisfied that this is a way of making a limited sum of public money go further, in the interests of the taxpayer and of the travelling public.

Let me end by promising that a Labour Government will get the DLR running effectively. Labour will ensure that there is an extension to Lewisham and south of the river, in the ways proposed in the Bill, but with more priority given to both safety considerations and the environmental impact of the railway. We believe that the railway can be made to work effectively, in the interests of Londoners, in the interests of those who seek to travel and, I hope, in the interests of those who live and work in its vicinity.

9.2 pm

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich): I have been involved in discussions about the railway extension since 1988. Those discussions have taken place on an all-borough, all-party basis. We have made forceful representations to the Minister, urging him to give the scheme favourable consideration. Although there may be some t's that we would have liked to cross differently, the broad principle of the extension is much needed by the people of south-east London.

Over the years, we have had a very raw deal south of the river in terms of public transport. We have almost been cut off: we have had no underground system and only a limited British Rail system. That has had some advantages for the people of Greenwich—it has retained a certain village-like quality, for instance—but, although that may have added to the charm of the place, it has certainly not added to local people's job prospects and it is inhibiting commuters.

Over recent decades, Greenwich has experienced a vast decline in industry. In the 1950s and 1960s, many residents could find employment very close to their homes—almost within walking distance. Unfortunately, that has changed. Now, people must travel to seek employment.

Greenwich is also experiencing a major housing crisis. As house prices in north London have steadily risen, more and more people have moved to south London, where—

[Mrs. Rosie Barnes]

for a while, at least—prices were more moderate. That has led to more people trying to reach other parts of London for work opportunities.

By railway development standards, the cost of this railway is relatively modest. The period of time involved is relatively short. We are not talking about a decade or more. The scheme could be up and running by the mid-1990s. There will be immediate benefits, therefore, if the scheme goes ahead. We have heard that about 12,000 commuters an hour will use the railway. I am not so pessimistic as the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) about the residents of south-east London being unable to obtain jobs in docklands. The current recession means that the hoped-for jobs in docklands are not there, but I have always taken the view that the people of Greenwich and Deptford—I have a little bit of Deptford in my constituency—must be given the opportunity to take advantage of the future work opportunities that docklands presents. I have never accepted the argument that docklands jobs are for a different category of people, with different educational attainments. If that presents a problem, it has to be tackled. We must make sure that our people have access to those jobs.

Congestion in the area, particularly when it comes to crossing the river in the morning, is appalling. Those who have to use the Blackwall tunnel or the Rotherhithe tunnel know of the delays that can be experienced. The Network SouthEast service in Greenwich is becoming almost a joke. We have experienced particular problems. I hope that the introduction of the Networker trains and the construction of the new tunnels will lead to a vast improvement. The present service, however, is infrequent and unreliable. Trains are frequently cancelled, or travellers experience considerable delays. The frustration of commuters is rising by the day.

A great step forward will be made by the combination of the docklands light railway extension and the Jubilee line which, for the first time, will link Greenwich with the underground system in London. Even those who travel to work by Rolls-Royce will be tempted to travel by means of a railway that allows them to cross the river to Canary wharf in 10 minutes and links them with other lines to take them into the City.

The railway's route through Greenwich is surprisingly uncomplicated. It will travel through pockets of residential areas. However, an almost ready-made route is available that would cause relatively little disruption to local residents. The railway will stimulate development and investment in Greenwich town centre. A great waterfront development is planned for the forthcoming decade. It will be no more than a pipedream, however, if a proper transport infrastructure is not provided.

I am concerned that the Bill's progress has already been somewhat delayed. That is due, in part, to the Prime Minister's announcement, that the scheme is to be transferred to the London Docklands development corporation which, I understand, will be the shareholder, banker and strategic planner, while the docklands light railway will continue to run the day-by-day business of the railway. I understand the Government's motive—that they need to reinspire confidence and initiative, since the railway has been regarded as a very poor substitute for what was originally promised. The number of breakdowns, the number of people stranded for hours on end and the inoperative nature of the scheme has caused great concern to those who had looked forward to its extension across the river. However, I have been reassured that some of the fundamental problems are already being tackled. Therefore, when the extension has been completed I expect it to run well.

I accept the LDDC's undertaking that it will honour all the commitments made to local groups and residents by London Regional Transport, but I share the concern of the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar that we need strategic planning for public transport in London so that we can achieve the long-overdue cohesion and co-ordination.

In my constituency, there has been some debate and controversy about whether we should have two stations relatively close together—one at the Cutty Sark and one at the British Rail station in Greenwich town centre. They are about five minutes walk apart and several bodies have argued forcefully that one would have been sufficient. I accept the principle that the railway will be a tram-like system which people will use for relatively short journeys to get very close to where they want to go. I also accept that commuters in Greenwich will find it easy to link with the British Rail station in Greenwich whereas tourists will want to use the Cutty Sark station.

I heard with concern what the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar said about the noise and deterioration experienced by her constituents over the years and I shall seek continual reassurance that that problem can and will be eradicated before there is any further development. The majority of constituents on the Meridian estate which will be affected by the Cutty Sark station will not, of course, have the immediate problem of noise, because at that point the extension will be underground, but, naturally, there are concerns. They fear dust, dirt and noise during the construction period and vibration once it is in operation.

One block of flats in particular has had a difficult few months. It was initially threatened with demolition and, although it now seems to have been spared that, it will bear the brunt of the dirt, noise and pollution during construction. I hope that the residents of Walrond house will be treated with the generosity and sensitivity that they need.

I should also like to draw the Minister's attention to the problem of residents in Straightsmouth who already have to contend with a great deal of noise from the British Rail tracks which run near their homes and which will have to be moved slightly nearer as a result of the development. I understand that the continuous track which they have requested is technically possible and it would, I believe, alleviate many of their problems. As so few residents will be adversely affected by the development, which will be to the great advantage of the vast majority, I hope that generosity can be the order of the day. However, the uncertainty of the past few years has been the worst of all worlds for many residents who have not known whether the development would go ahead.

I strongly recommend that there is no delay in proceeding with the Bill, as it will be to the enormous advantage of the people of south-east London. It will substantially improve the quality of their lives and provide access to job opportunities currently denied them. We are talking about journeys of 10 minutes as opposed to a miserable journey of, perhaps, an hour and a half stuck in a car trying to get through the Blackwall tunnel in the rush

hour. Such journeys are proving to be an enormous barrier. It is extremely frustrating for people who can stand in Greenwich park and see the development in docklands. Let us hope that, when the area eventually becomes economically more vibrant, people in Greenwich will be able to do more than see it—let us hope that they can participate in it.

9.14 pm

Mr. Alan Amos (Hexham): I am a strong supporter of public transport in London and I frequently try to get to work on the docklands light railway. It follows, therefore, that I support the extension of the DLR. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for his close and genuine interest in the operation of the DLR. I remember one occasion on which he offered to come to my house and to come into central London with me on the DLR. Fortunately for him, he could not do so that morning. If he had tried to make that journey, he would have been half an hour late.

I have one serious concern. How can the management of the DLR be expected to run an extended system to Lewisham and Greenwich when they cannot run the present system? Docklands Light Railway Limited must be the most badly managed and incompetently run part of the whole London transport system. I have wasted more time hanging around for trains and buses than I care to remember. The Government were right to transfer the management of the DLR from London Regional Transport to the London Docklands development corporation if for no other reason than that the LDDC cannot do any worse than LRT has.

The basis of my concern is widespread. About two years ago, I went to see the management of the DLR to discuss my concern about the unreliability of the system. I was then introduced to the proposals for the extension under the river to the south and I was given a map. I was concerned by what I saw on the map, so a few days later I went to LRT to discuss the proposals with it. I was told that the map I had been given was already nine months out of date and that all the proposals had been changed. I was not impressed by the management of DLR giving me a map that was more than nine months out of date.

Mudchute and Island Gardens are the two stations affected by the extension. I understand the need and desire of the DLR management to double the length of the trains which means that they have to double the length of the platforms. However, they did not double the length of Mudchute station and Island Gardens station. The people using those stations face a reduced service because trains terminate at Crossharbour. The galling point was that the DLR management put notices through the doors of local residents saying that that represented an improvement of the service of the DLR, although the opposite was the case. People are not fooled by such stupid statements.

No notice is given of changes in the bus routes which operate in the evenings and at weekends. There are no public announcements on platforms about what is going on during the daily disruption. The indicator boards on the stations rarely work. The escalator at Tower Gateway is frequently out of operation. In other words, the service is infrequent, irregular and unreliable.

There is no co-ordination between routes to Stratford and the connecting trains at Crossharbour to Tower Gateway and Bank. The disruption is bad because it is daily. The only thing that is regular, reliable and predictable is the extent of the disruption.

The DLR's reputation is now appalling, but I fear that it is justifiable. What concerns me most is that it is bad for the long-term success of docklands, to which I am strongly committed, and it undermines all the good work of the developers, of the Government and of the others involved in the massive enterprise. I say yes to the extension, but only if the management are paid by results directly related to the DLR's reliability and punctuality, which is the only incentive to bring about radical improvements in the operation of any newly extended system. The DLR is superb in concept, but disgraceful in its management.

I urge the promoters to take note of those serious points. I have described what we have had to put up with over the past four years. If the system is extended, as I believe that it should be, it is vital that the quality of the service is dramatically improved. The people of that part of London deserve better from the management of the DLR.

9.19 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) is right that, in many ways, the docklands light railway has been a disaster—one might even say an unmitigated disaster. The blame for that rests with the Government because it was the Government who built it on the cheap. It is an example of market forces at work and of what happens when there is a lack of proper planning in building such a system and in seeking to provide a good transport infrastructure for the area. For 13 wasted years, this Government have let market forces run the show.

Matters will not be made better if we allow the LDDC to take over. The LDDC eulogised the system when it first appeared but the LDDC is not—and nor has it ever been—a transport operator. It will control the railway only as a first step towards privatisation. I think that the disaster will continue as a result of the Government's chosen course.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) on a superb constituency speech. When the general election comes—perhaps on 9 April—she will be returned with a handsome and increased majority. The people of Bow and Poplar should be told how she defended their interests in the House when the Government, LRT and the LDDC wanted to walk all over them. No doubt my hon. Friend will see off the challenge from the Liberals quite comfortably. It is interesting that they have not been here at all. I suspect that, if the Bill and the interests of the people of Bow and Poplar were up before the House for discussion again in future, they would not be here to defend the area's interests.

Mr. Skinner: I have been here for a while and I have been looking for the Liberal Democrats, as they call themselves nowadays. It is just conceivable that they are having a caucus meeting to change their name again. It is just possible, with an election coming up. They have had their name for a year and a half—it is the longest lasting name that they have had since the last general election. Mr. Speaker should be told about this matter because, when they change their name, the question arises whether they

[Mr. Skinner]

should receive what is called the Short money which they get on the basis of their name at the previous general election.

It is also possible that the Liberal Democrats are not interested in railways and that what they are interested in is getting round Paddy Backdown—I nearly said something else—otherwise known as Captain Mainwaring so that this little Dad's Army can have a caucus meeting to discuss what to do at the general election. They have all these high-flown ideas; we shall probably see them on telly tomorrow. I can see that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are beginning to think, "What has this got to do with the docklands light railway?" I can understand that, but I think that you will agree that railways are an environmental issue. They are an issue that is supposed to be for the anoraked people—the ones with green wellies who eat brown rice—but they are nowhere to be found. What can they expect when they are being led by him?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman had a good run but, as he admitted, what he said had nothing to do with the Bill.

Mr. Cohen: I can well imagine the Liberal Democrats having a caucus meeting about their name because they certainly have no policies worth talking about. They have shown us that they are not interested in the environment and in public transport.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) said, the Labour party welcomes investment in new public transport infrastructure. Such investment has been grossly lacking in 13 years of this Government. We have had £109 billion from North sea oil but very little of it has gone into public transport infrastructure. The Minister said again tonight that he wants to rely only on private money. Where is private money during a recession?

Mr. Skinner: In Lloyd's?

Mr. Cohen: No, it is not there either. The Government are washing their hands of what they should do in terms of building up our public transport infrastructure. I welcome the element in the Bill concerning the extension to south London.

Mr. Redmond: We used to have an excellent transport service in south Yorkshire until the Government intervened. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) will agree that London desperately needs a co-ordinated transport system which takes people off the road and puts them on to rail. However, the Government have no sensible suggestions in that regard because they believe in market forces. Regrettably, market forces do nothing to improve services. Instead, they cause the cost of fares for the people in London to escalate. As a northern person, I implore people in London to demand co-ordinated cheap and efficient services so that the emergency services can move freely on the roads in London, something that they cannot do now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) will be very ingenious if he can respond to that intervention and remain in order.

Mr. Cohen: I can do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the Bill will mean less co-ordination of services because the control of London's transport is being fragmented. By passing control to the LDDC halfway through the procedure, there will be less co-ordination. My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) speaks from experience. He knows that we get better services if there is overall co-ordination.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar was right to say that the docklands light railway does not run properly. However, will the new line run properly? My hon. Friend said that the residents in her area suffer from noise and pollution. Will residents by the extended line suffer noise and pollution problems? She said that inherent noise problems were built in at the initial stage. Will that be the case with the extension? She also referred to inherent breakdowns. Will they occur on the new system?

The Minister made a very short speech, but he should have found time to respond to those basic issues about the docklands light railway. He should at least have said that the new system will not have the faults of the existing system. It was worrying that the Minister could not give any assurance about that. It looks like the same problems will be experienced, but that they will be extended.

In those circumstances, it might have been a better option to extend and improve the east London line to south and south-east London. The east London line has better links with east London and it might have been an option worth considering. Even if there are problems with the docklands light railway and the Minister still wants to go ahead——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair has allowed a fairly wide debate on the Third Reading of this Bill because it is closely linked with the Second Reading of the No. 2 Bill. However, it strays beyond that for the hon. Member for Leyton to talk about other options.

Mr. Cohen: I accede to your point, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Redmond: I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that the argument has been about the lack of response by the Government to compensate those who will be affected by the development. If the residents are convinced that compensation is the order of the day, they should press and press again. Only by doing that can they hope for a Government U-turn, which the Government have done in respect of many other matters not connected with this. I urge the residents to ensure that they give maximum support to my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon), who has done such an excellent job. The only way to obtain compensation is to press and press again. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees with me.

Mr. Cohen: I agree with my hon. Friend.

The transfer of the Bill to the LDDC halfway through its proceedings is disgraceful. The Bill was brought forward by the LRT and it was later switched over to the LDDC. Nobody knows who is responsible for what. Who is responsible for controlling the contractor, who is responsible for safety, and who is responsible for the compensation that the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar have requested? Again, no light was shed on that matter by the Minister. That is a disgrace.

The transfer to the LDDC is wrong in principle, because we cannot ensure the strategic planning for London transport as a whole, and it breaks up

management of the transport network. It also is a step in the direction of privatisation. The travelcard and concessionary fares systems could be put at risk in that part of the network. The transfer to the LDDC is wrong, particularly halfway through the proceedings on this private Bill.

Under the private Bill procedure, there was an objection by my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar. Attempts should have been made to meet her objection to try to resolve the matter. That is the normal process. If there is no objection, a Bill quickly passes through the House. If there is an objection, a Bill can sometimes flounder. I do not think that the objection that my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar eloquently put was insurmountable. If LRT, the LDDC or the Government wanted to, they could have met her objection. In part, they did not want to because they were shifting responsibility. They could have set up the community trust fund to supply some of the compensation to which my hon. Friend referred.

One of the few points that the Minister made about the amenity fund was that it has nothing to do with the Department of Transport, but it is a matter for the Department of the Environment. He said, "Go to it and try to persuade it to give you a few bob for the residents who are suffering." If a Department of the Environment Minister had been present, he would have said, "It has nothing to do with us, it concerns the Department of Transport." That mirrors the shift of responsibility between London Regional Transport and the LDDC. The LDDC says, "It has nothing to do with us, it is a matter for the docklands corporation." The docklands corporation would say, "It has nothing to do with us; London Transport is bringing forward the Bill." That demonstrates the Government's shiftiness in avoiding resolving my hon. Friend's simple objection. It took an hour to raise it because it could not be resolved simply.

Mr. Freeman: There was no ambiguity in what I said. The Government's proposal is to transfer the DLR from London Regional Transport to the LDDC. If a decision is taken to ratify that and give instructions to London Regional Transport to that effect, responsibility for the amenity fund will rest with the LDDC. The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock), who spoke for the Opposition, gave no commitment or promise to provide an amenity fund. I have not ruled it out and I hope that I have given a positive, clear and constructive response to the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon). I have visited the site. I recognise the problems and I have told her where the responsibility lies.

Mr. Cohen: I still think that the Minister is being somewhat mealy-mouthed. He says that the responsibility is with the LDDC but does not give any commitment to a fund.

Ms. Gordon: My hon. Friend is right. The Minister may have come down to the site and may have sympathy with the community and understand its problems but my impression is that the decision about a fund will be taken by the Department of the Environment and the LDDC, which is not sympathetic. We could not get more than £50,000 for thousands of television aerials, so how can we expect to obtain a decent amenity fund as compensation for the loss of facilities with the docklands light railway extension?

The people of Greenwich and Lewisham should also ask what type of metal the extension will be made of. Will it be heavy-gauge metal or the light metal with metal wheels against metal tracks that will deteriorate, need regrinding and make a terrible noise? Many matters have been left out which should have been specified in the Bill, so we cannot be certain how the line will be built. Therefore, we have to oppose it.

Mr. Cohen: I hear what my hon. Friend says. We have reached the Third Reading of the Bill. My hon. Friend has made her objections clear from the initiation of the Pill in the House. The Government, the promoters or the LDDC, which will take over the railway, should have got their act together, met my hon. Friend and come up with an offer of compensation for her constituents who will suffer. It is all right for the Minister to say that he is still open minded. He should have come up with the cash. He has had plenty of time to do that.

Mr. Redmond: Can my hon. Friend clarify what the Minister said? Lots of names are being bandied about by the Minister and he has made lots of promises about the project. But I am at a loss to understand—perhaps my hon. Friend can explain—why positive steps have not been taken to allay the fears of my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) and to meet the objections of her constituents. I listened most carefully to what the Minister said. Does my hon. Friend agree that there may be a danger that any money found for compensation will be taken elsewhere? Given the great giveaway that is taking place, I am at a loss to understand why the Minister has not come to the Dispatch Box and said that several million pounds will be provided to satisfy the points raised.

Mr. Cohen: That is a fair point. The Government think that my hon. Friend's constituents are not important and that they can walk all over them. Until now, the Government thought that they could walk all over my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar, even though she has made an objection on behalf of her constituents. She has shown the Government that they have another think coming. She will not let the Government walk all over her constituents and treat them in such an appalling way. The Minister must come up with the cash and an amenity fund to compensate her constituents.

The environmental aspects of the extension must also be dealt with. As my hon. Friend said, it is being built on the cheap. Some sections should be built by cut and cover. Improvement of the environment, compensation and the amenity fund should be written into the Bill.

Mr. Skinner: I am pleased that my hon. Friend has referred to the environment. We are talking about an environmentally sensitive aea. A Tory Minister came here the other day and talked about providing money for environmentally sensitive areas. I thought, "Hello. Summat for Bolsover, because of the dioxin." But I am not going to talk about that tonight. What was it for? It was money for environmentally sensitive areas in Tory marginal seats. It was an electorally sensitive area grant.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) is representing her constituents and demanding some form of compensation for them from this tinpot Minister, who reckons to run the railways, because they

[Mr. Skinner]

will be blighted by the railway development and what she referred to as its Hornby-like tracks. I had better not say any more because it is already a matter for the courts.

The Secretary of State for Transport is here—the Minister who went upstairs to see the railway exhibition on the first floor of the House of Commons last week. What did he do? The £60,000 a year Tory Cabinet Minister smashed the clockwork trains. The whole clockwork arrangement on the floor came to a shuddering halt when that man ran it into the ground. He is supposed to have had 13 years in Government and he cannot even run a clockwork train. He is educated beyond his intelligence. Let us hear from him.

Mr. Cohen: I am happy to give way to the Minister.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) because he has given me the first opportunity since that curious piece appeared in *The Times* Diary to say that *The Times* has since apologised. It was a case of mistaken identity. I have not even visited the exhibition in question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that we can now get back on the rails.

Mr. Cohen: I shall try to get back on track, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I agree that the area should be treated as environmentally sensitive. That is why I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar. The railway should be in cuts or covered in certain places and the amenity fund to compensate her constituents should be on the face of the Bill. We need more commitment than the Minister has shown tonight. The opinion of the House is clear—he should come up with the cash. He should compensate my hon. Friend's constituents.

Mr. Redmond: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Cohen: Yes, but this will have to be the last intervention.

Mr. Redmond: I am concerned whether the Bill will provide what it says that it intends to provide—an efficient cheap service which will be integrated with the London transport system. I am not confident that that is the case. I have listened to some of the arguments, although not all. Will my hon. Friend give me some assurance which will stop a Division? Having taken a train to travel here on Sunday night and sampled some of the delays on the way from Scotland to the City, I wonder whether one can accept what is being said by the Government side and by the promoter of the Bill. Can my hon. Friend give me that assurance as I have grave reservations?

Mr. Cohen: I suspect that my hon. Friend will not get a reservation on that particular train. I cannot give my hon. Friend the assurance he requires because I suspect that the train will not be cheap in terms of fares. However, it certainly will be cheap in terms of its building costs—just like the existing system. The service will not be integrated because it will be managed in a different way from London Transport.

Ms. Gordon: My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) has asked serveral times to be assured that the railway will be a cheap and integrated service. It is my understanding that the private company that will run that railway will charge a premium fare. We do not know how much that will be and whether it will be in line with normal fares. Perhaps the Minister can comment on that.

Mr. Cohen: We are on Third Reading, with 16 minutes of debate to go and we now learn that premium fares are likely to be charged. That was not referred to by the sponsor or the Minister in his exceptionally short speech. It is extremely worrying to contemplate the introduction of premium fares. Fares across the capital have already gone up, so how much will the premium fare be? What effect will it have on concessionary fares?

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) demanded from the Minister what would happen in the subsequent takeover in respect of concessionary fares for pensioners and the disabled. The concessionary fare system in London is pretty good in comparison with the rest of the country. In response the Minister said something like, "It is not our intention". We know that that is parliamentary gobbledegook, because that means that in the event of the Tories winning the next election—if they are lucky—the whole concessionary fare system could go down the drain. That is what "intention" means.

The Government are now talking about a public sector borrowing requirement of up to £30 billion and it is a scandal that they cannot find enough money to compensate the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar. What is worse, someone from the royal family will open the railway. Di will turn up in her Mercedes or the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), who got a Mercedes from Maxwell for a quid, might come along. I have a straight John Bull question for my hon. Friend. Does he believe that the compensation for the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar should come from taxing the Queen's income?

Mr. Cohen: That is a fair question. I signed the early-day motion, along with a number of hon. Members, to that effect.

I doubt whether the Queen will come along to open this particular line, because the story goes that she came along to open the original docklands light railway and got stuck in one of the carriages. She got stuck because the railway was of a poor standard, even then. She will probably send Fergie along instead in the hope that she will get stuck in a carriage for ever.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) was right about borrowing, which will be a key issue in the Budget. They should borrow the money to compensate the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar. If borrowing is a good option when it comes to the economy——

Mr. Skinner: It is flavour of the month.

Mr. Cohen: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. Therefore, it is appropriate to borrow money to compensate my hon. Friend's constituents and to improve their environment.

Mr. Cryer: We are now on Third Reading and, unfortunately, amendments are not easily applicable at this stage. My hon. Friend the Member for Bow and

Poplar (Ms. Gordon) is the principal opponent of the Bill. However, she has made it clear that she supports the construction of railways, as we all do in the Labour party. However, because of the absence of clear safeguards in the Bill, she felt that she had to oppose it. Could my hon. Friend elaborate on some of those safeguards so that the House can be quite clear about the argument? People are keen to have railways that provide public transport on the basis of decent safeguards, but those safeguards have been rejected by the promoters in what appears to be a disgraceful fashion.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend is right. I support improving and investing in the railways and our whole public transport infrastructure. In his repeated interventions, my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) has answered my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). We need a co-ordinated system of public transport. Indeed, in London we need an integrated public transport system. Instead, we have chaos in many respects.

Mr. Redmond: Two points need to be clarified. First, reference has been made to whether the construction will be of a standard to ensure that the line will be able to run without the breakdowns associated with the modern system. The service that British Rail operates leaves a hell of a lot to be desired. If the Bill allows substandard development, it will lead to all sorts of chaos, such as we hear on news bulletins on transport in London.

Secondly, will my hon. Friend clarify the Minister's point about concessionary fares that will apply to residents of the area? Who will pay for them? They will be financed not by the company seeking to own and operate the railway but by the various boroughs that fall within the area covered by the line.

Will the construction of the railway be of a substantial nature and who will pay for the concessionary fares that the Minister said will be available once a private company is operating the line?

Mr. Cohen: That is exactly what the Minister was asked. Will there be the same problems with the extended line as there are with the existing docklands light railway? The Minister failed to respond or say whether it would be an improvement on the existing structure. I suspect that it will not.

I am reminded of an appalling evening that I spent in the docklands. Actually, I enjoyed the concert at the London Arena with my step-lad and his girlfriend. We travelled on the docklands light railway but halfway through the concert it was announced that the light railway would not be running at the end of the concert. So we were trapped in the arena and had to walk back in the pouring rain. I am told that that is not the first time that that has happened—*[Interruption.]* I have said who was at the concert on previous occasions because I have recounted the story in the past. Many people are caught because the operators arbitrarily stop running the trains. I wonder whether they will do the same with the extension.

Mr. Cryer: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Cohen: Let me answer the first point about concessionary fares. The Minister said that they would continue, but how much is his assurance worth? Who will pay for those concessionary fares? I doubt whether the LDDC will pay for them if the Bill does not force it to do so. If no legal commitment enforces it to do so, it will not pay for concessionary fares. The next step, as the LDDC goes out of business, will be to sell the railway off and the next company that takes it over and strips its assets will not run a concessionary fare system either. It will certainly not do so out of charity.

We support an improved transport infrastructure for the people of Lewisham and south-east London. I want those people to get the jobs, and the seats on the trains—but I wonder whether they will get either. The Government bribed the people of Kent in the channel tunnel episode; now they are bribing them with the promise of jobs in docklands. When the trains arrive in Lewisham they will be packed with commuters from Kent whom the Tories are still keen to bribe. So the people of Lewisham, who may think that the extension is a life-saver, will not get their bums on the seats, let alone any jobs.

I should have thought that the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) would demand that some trains set off from Lewisham and Greenwich to cater for local people; otherwise, the commuters arriving at British Rail stations will enter the trains first——

Ms. Gordon: My hon. Friend might like to know that once the railway is extended to Greenwich and later further into Kent my constituents will probably not be able to get seats at Island Gardens ever again. I asked London Transport to arrange that one train every half hour should start at Island Gardens so that people could get a seat on it. London Transport refused; in fact, it did not give way on anything.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend's demand was most reasonable. *[Interruption.]* I see that one of the Conservative Members who represents Lewisham has walked into the Chamber. The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) has an important role in the Treasury: he can borrow the money. I am pleased that he has walked in—*[Interruption.]* I see that both Conservative Members representing Lewisham are here now. The other one, the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan), has had to take time off to decide which one of his brothers should get a knighthood. These gentlemen could borrow the money so that my hon. Friend's constituents were given the environment that they deserve and the compensation that they deserve.

I have no intention of talking out the Bill, and I have tried to be brief. *[Interruption.]* I have taken a lot of interventions—worthy interventions that deserved a response. I am happy to sit down now and allow the sponsor of the Bill the last few words.

9.58 pm

Mr. Thorne: With the leave of the House, I shall reply to this interesting debate. I will certainly not talk the Bill out.

The hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) made a detailed speech. I should like to correct one point in it—the original railway was designed for 25,000, not 1,500 people a day. It is now designed to cater for 100,000 a day. I am afraid that there is no time to discuss the hon. Lady's other points. I know that LRT is anxious to discuss various aspects of the Bill with her and that it has been

[Mr. Thorne]

waiting since last October to do so. I hope that she will take the opportunity to discuss her various concerns with LRT in the near future—it is anxious to hear from her.

The Minister asked about the future of Island Gardens station. It is to be demolished; the new viaduct is to be demolished, but the old viaduct will be left, because, although it has not been preserved, it is of architectural interest. I am afraid that I have no more time in which to respond.

Mr. Redmond: I am grateful for an opportunity to say a few words about this matter——

Mr. Thorne *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 123, Noes 29.

Division No. 92] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Arbuthnot, James
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marek, Dr John
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Ruddock, Joan
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Trippier, David
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Bottomley and
Mr. Christopher Gill.

NOES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Boyes, Roland
Callaghan, Jim
Cohen, Harry
Dalyell, Tam
Dixon, Don
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Fatchett, Derek
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grocott, Bruce
Illsley, Eric
Lamond, James
Lewis, Terry
McCrea, Rev William
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Meale, Alan
Nellist, Dave
Paisley, Rev Ian
Redmond, Martin
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Soley, Clive
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 127, Noes 19.

Division No. 93] **[10.10 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Arbuthnot, James
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Flynn, Paul
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Rev William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marek, Dr John
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve

Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patnick, Irvine
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Price, Sir David
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Trippier, David
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Bottomley and
Mr. Christopher Gill.

NOES

Bermingham, Gerald
Boyes, Roland
Callaghan, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Dixon, Don
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Lamond, James
Lewis, Terry
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Meale, Alan
Nellist, Dave
Parry, Robert
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Skinner, Dennis
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Martin Redmond and
Mr. Harry Barnes.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read the Third time, and passed.

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 27 February.

LONDON UNDERGROUND (GREEN PARK) BILL *(By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 27 February.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Parliamentary Corporate Bodies Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Orders of the Day

Parliamentary Corporate Bodies Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

10.21 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I have it in Command from the Queen to acquaint the House that Her Majesty, having been informed of the purport of the Bill, has consented to place her prerogative and interest, so far as they are affected by the Bill, at the disposal of Parliament for the purposes of the Bill.

I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The House will have observed that the names of all the present members of the House of Commons Commission except yours, Mr. Speaker, appear on the back of the Bill as supporters. Their support, which I appreciate, demonstrates that this is an agreed measure.

This is a short, technical Bill which the House of Commons Commission, as well as the authorities in another place, have been advised is necessary to enable further progress to be made in implementing the Ibbs report on House of Commons services. We had hoped to avoid the need for a Bill and have looked at various ways of doing so before finally accepting recently that the legislative route was the only one to overcome the problem.

In accordance with the timetable recommended in the Ibbs report, responsibility for works, and vote responsibility for stationery and printing is due to pass to Parliament on 1 April this year. The relevant estimates have already been presented. As things stand, there is a problem because there exists no legal persona in either House to whom property, leases and contracts can be made over. The House will quickly recognise the quite serious practical difficulties to which that could give rise. The solution, encapsulated in clauses 1 and 2, is to constitute the Clerks of each House as corporations sole under whose authority these and similar functions in other spheres of parliamentary activity, such as broadcasting and information technology, can be carried out.

The remaining clauses make provision for the takeover of works services. The Commission is grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and his Department—and, indeed, to Her Majesty the Queen's advisers—for their co-operation in facilitating the transfer and helping with the preparation of the Bill, which has been quite a complicated operation.

Two other provisions are of particular note. Clause 4 rectifies an anomaly, which has been encountered in other contexts, where civil servants have been transferred to new undertakings still in the public service. Under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981, purely technical redundancies can arise for people who, to all intents and purposes, will be doing the same job under essentially the same terms of service. The clause extinguishes any resulting technical redundancy rights—and I stress the word "technical". For those who continue in their jobs, there is clearly no case for contemplating such rights. I can assure the House that it has no effect at all on

[Mr. John MacGregor]

actual terms of service or on pension rights or on the rights of any employees if they are actually made redundant at any time.

I might also mention at this stage—although the point is not affected by the terms of the Bill—that the House of Commons Commission has accepted that, on 1 April, all the new employees of the House will retain their existing trade union affiliations if they so wish. In due course, proper recognition procedures will have to be undertaken and the arrangements for trade union representation assimilated into the House's existing structure, with whatever amendments may prove necessary. But, as I have said, nothing in the Bill will pre-empt this process.

Finally, I should mention the issue raised in the amendments to clauses 1 and 2 tabled by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), in his capacity as Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee, and my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), to whom I am grateful. Let me make it clear that the Government accept the amendments. I agree that it would be awkward and anomalous for the Bill, through the provisions removing Crown immunity from the corporate officers, to force upon the two Houses the necessity to apply for planning, listed building and building permission for any works schemes on land that we will own outside the Palace itself.

The suggestion is that appropriate provision to make exceptions for those purposes—but not for other purposes—should be included in an Order in Council subject to the negative procedure in both Houses. What we are doing in the amendments is providing for the possibility of meeting the wishes of the Accommodation and Works Committee.

As I have said, the Bill has the support of the House of Commons Commission and I commend it to the House.

10.25 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): It is something of a pleasure to be speaking from the Dispatch Box on a Bill among whose sponsors are listed my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), in the near-certain knowledge that that Bill will pass on to the statute book. This is the first time that I can recall that happening for some time—although after 9 April it will, of course, be happening regularly and that is something in which to rejoice.

As the Leader of the House said, this is a small but important measure. Not being a member of the House of Commons Commission—and in that I am almost unique among those present—I was surprised to discover that it was necessary to introduce a Bill to enact what was basically a fairly simple measure.

The Bill was designed following the Ibbs report to bring us perhaps not into the 21st century but just about into the 20th century. I hope that I shall not sound a sour note if I say that even this little Bill appears to be trying to make us preserve the fiction that the really important House is the one down the corridor. Is it purely churlish on my part to ask why the other place is dealt with in clause 1 while this place is dealt with in clause 2? Why is their Lordships' corporate officer described as the Clerk of the Parliaments and ours as the Under Clerk of the Parliaments?

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Deeply demeaning.

Mr. Grocott: It is deeply demeaning, as my hon. Friend says. Perhaps as we stumble towards the 21st century, we shall come to accept that this place is marginally more important that the other place.

The Leader of the House touched on an extremely important matter on which I should like something placed on record. We are dealing not just with equipment and powers in this small Bill but with people's careers and livelihoods. We are dealing with the staff who will be affected by the change and I understand that they will include as many as 70 non-industrial civil servants and 120 industrial civil servants. I seek confirmation from the Leader of the House—either now or at a later stage in our proceedings, which will doubtless be fairly short—and an absolute assurance that the staff have been consulted at all appropriate stages in the development of the proposals and that, in any subsequent decisions affecting the staff, there will be full consultation with the staff affected and the relevant trade unions.

In particular, can the Leader of the House confirm again—I am fairly certain that I heard him say precisely this during his opening remarks—that there will be absolutely no adverse effects on the terms and conditions of employment of staff, including working hours, holiday entitlements and pension entitlements following any transfer of staff? Will the right hon. Gentleman also confirm their right to continue to be represented in negotiations by the trade union of their choice?

Mr. MacGregor: Perhaps I can clarify the position. As I said, clause 4 does not affect the pension rights and so on of those who are transferred. With regard to trade union recognition, any recognition negotiations after 1 April will be conducted by the transferred staffs' existing trade unions and through the consultation machinery to which they have become used.

Mr. Grocott: I am grateful for that confirmation.

As I did not speak in the debate on the Ibbs report, I must state that the Bill is not a sterile piece of legislation although it certainly does not make good bedtime reading. It does, however, have some important functions. I hope that it will be a move towards our having far better and more satisfactory working conditions, not just for ourselves, but—far more importantly—for those who work for us and those who visit the Palace of Westminster. Given that the Ibbs report found that no fewer than 69 per cent. of hon. Members thought that the Palace was a poor place in which to work, it should not take too much to begin to improve that position.

I want particularly to emphasise the need for improved working conditions for those who work for hon. Members. We are not looking for glossy paradises in which to work ourselves—far from it. We want minimum conditions in which we can operate and good conditions for our employees. In particular, I want to underline the appalling lack of facilities for visitors to the Palace who still have nowhere satisfactory to wait when they come to tour the House of Lords and the Commons. They have no proper refreshment facilities and I hope that, as a result of the Bill and similar decisions, there will be substantial improvements in that respect.

I am not asking for vast amounts of money to be spent. However, I hope that some areas of the Palace of Westminster can be used more effectively than they are at present. I am not convinced that Westminster Hall is used

as effectively as it might be. I am certain that there are parts of the Palace which very few people know exist. One of the joys of being a member of the Select Committee on Broadcasting was that we found a huge area, to which I have referred before, above the Central Lobby which no one knew existed before. It contained the odd plank, bucket and a half empty tea cup. That huge space had not been used before and it could have been used to accommodate the control room for the television studios and also a couple of television studios.

When we finally get control over our own affairs—the Bill goes part of the way towards achieving that—I hope that we shall be able to use most effectively all the accommodation presently available in the building. I will raise one other potentially divisive note: I wonder whether the balance of accommodation in the Palace between the amount used by the House of Lords and that used by the House of Commons has changed this century. In asking that question, I break all the rules, because it is a question to which I genuinely do not know the answer. The balance of power between the two Houses has changed this century and the balance of work rate has also inevitably changed this century. I wonder whether the use of the accommodation in the Palace of Westminster reflects the work required to be performed by the two Houses.

We must work towards raising our facilities up to minimum standards for ourselves, staff and visitors. We should also try to improve facilities. The Leader of the House touched on that matter.

I look forward to the time when—I am not alone in saying this—hon. Members will have in their rooms the clean feed of the televising of the proceedings of Parliament. It is odd that we can see them via satellite but we cannot do so from a direct feed to our offices. It is odd also that Ministers can do so in their offices but the rest of us cannot. I look forward to resolving that matter in due course.

This debate is related to what we shall debate next Monday, which is the procedure of the House of Commons. I do not think that all improvements will necessarily mean additional costs. There are many things that we could do which might reduce costs. For example, why are we here at 10.35 pm debating this matter? Why could we not do so in the morning?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): Why does the hon. Gentleman not sit down then?

Mr. Grocott: I shall sit down and be quiet if my two or three minutes over the limit enable us to debate such matters at 9 am instead of at 10.30 pm. They would be three minutes of my time most usefully spent.

With those comments, in particular those underlining the staffing queries, I am happy to support the Bill.

10.35 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Although technical in character, the Bill is the expression of a fundamental change in the way we organise our affairs in the House of Commons. It is part of a process of taking control of the buildings into the hands of hon. Members, a process that began in 1975 with the setting up of the House of Commons Commission, which took the employment of staff under the control of hon. Members. That is not a nominal process, as it would be if the House of Commons Commission were merely a Government body. It is a process in which there is wide representation, indeed, a majority of interests other than those of the Government. That should remain a characteristic of the bodies through which we carry out the responsibilities expressed in the Bill.

For Parliament to be independent, it must regulate its own affairs independently of the Government of the day. The Government come to Parliament to bring forward their legislation and to be answerable to Parliament, but Parliament must control its own affairs. It is therefore a happy occasion that there are the names of members of the Government, the Opposition, Liberal Democrats and other Back-Bench Members on the Bill. That is a necessary feature of the process of ensuring that Parliament is genuinely independent and in control of its own affairs.

10.36 pm

Sir Barney Hayhoe (Brentford and Isleworth): I endorse what the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has said. Such matters are deeply for the House of Commons, not just Front-Bench Members. It is right and proper that there should be brief interventions from Back-Bench Members in support of the measure. I certainly endorse the commendation of the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Bill immediately considered in Committee.

Clause 1

ESTABLISHMENT OF A CORPORATION TO BE KNOWN AS "THE CORPORATE OFFICER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS"

10.38 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 2, line 9, at beginning insert

'Except in so far as Her Majesty may by Order in Council otherwise provide'.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this, it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 2, in page 2, line 13, at end insert—

'(7) A statutory instrument made in the exercise of the power conferred by subsection (6) above shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution either House of Parliament.'.

No 3, in clause 2, page 2, line 44, at beginning insert

'Except in so far as Her Majesty may by Order in Council otherwise provide'.

No. 4 in clause 2, page 4, line 48, at end insert—

'(7) A statutory instrument made in the exercise of the power conferred by subsection (6) above shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution either House of Parliament.'.

Mr. Powell: As Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee, I speak on behalf of my colleagues and, I hope, for the new generation of domestic Select Committees in welcoming the Bill.

Initially, with my characteristic Welsh suspicion of being on the receiving end of something spontaneously offered, I wondered whether the Bill was simply a manoeuvre to strengthen further the already formidable influence of the Clerk of the House. But, as I understand

[Mr. Powell]

it, the Bill seeks only to establish in the form of corporate bodies the legal representative of each House who may, among other things, acquire property and enter into contracts. As such, the Bill gives legal force to the arrangements recommended by Sir Robin Ibbs and approved by the House. All hon. Members will remember the excellent report that Sir Robin Ibbs rendered to the House, which was accepted unanimously and has since been implemented.

The amendments arise out of concern on both sides of the House that the change in the nominal ownership of the parliamentary outbuildings might result in the House being subject to planning procedures in respect of its future building projects which would not have applied if the estate had remained under the control of the Secretary of State for the Environment.

The Bill provides for the transfer of parliamentary outbuildings from the Secretary of State to one or both of the so-called corporate officers. Clauses 1(6) and 2(6) specifically provide that any property so transferred

"shall not be regarded as property of, or property held on behalf of, the Crown."

Although the transfer of ownership and control of the outbuildings to Parliament is to be welcomed, it appears to have the side effect of making the buildings subject to a range of legislation. In the case of most of this legislation, the Accommodation and Works Committee would raise no objections.

However, the Committee is worried that the effect of the Bill could be to impose town and country planning regulations at variance with those that apply to the Palace of Westminster. For this reason, the Accommodation and Works Committee would have wished to move amendments merely to retain or restore Crown immunity to the outbuildings in respect of the town and country planning Acts alone. We have been advised, however, that such amendments to the main Bill would have been difficult, if not impossible, to draft. Instead, we have proposed amendments which would enable Crown immunity to be restored to the outbuildings in respect of special legislation. Any statutory instrument to that effect would be subject to amendment in pursuance of a resolution of either House.

The purpose of the amendments is to allow planning for phase 2 of the new parliamentary buildings to proceed as if the parliamentary outbuildings had continued to enjoy immunity as Crown property. They are designed for no other purpose, and we would not expect the additional powers included in the amendments to be used to claim immunity from other legislation.

These are minor amendments which will assist the House in proceeding with the programme to provide adequate office accommodation for all Members and their staff. They have the unanimous support of the Accommodation and Works Committee. I hope that the Government and the House will support them.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 2, in page 2, line 13, at end insert—

'(7) A statutory instrument made in the exercise of the power conferred by subsection (6) above shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament'.—*[Mr. Ray Powell.]*

Clause 1, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2

ESTABLISHMENT OF A CORPORATION TO BE KNOWN AS "THE CORPORATE OFFICER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS"

Amendments made: No. 3, in page 2, line 44, at beginning insert—

'Except in so far as Her Majesty may by Order in Council otherwise provide'.

No. 4, in page 2, line 48, at end insert—

'(7) A statutory instrument made in the exercise of the power conferred by subsection (6) above shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament'.—*[Mr. Ray Powell.]*

Clause 2, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 3 to 8 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill reported, with amendments; as amended, considered.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the draft Farm Woodland Premium Scheme 1992, which was laid before this House on 31st January, be approved.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.) and Order [6 February],

That the draft revised Code of Practice on picketing, which was laid before this House on 4th February, be approved. —*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

CARBON DIOXIDE EMISSIONS AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 8918/91, relating to Community strategy to limit carbon dioxide emissions and to improve energy efficiency, and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of the Environment on behalf of HM Treasury, the Department of the Environment and the Department of Energy on 11th February 1992; welcomes the conclusions of the joint Energy/Environment Council of Ministers on 13th December and of ECOFIN on 16th December as a positive step forward in agreeing a coherent and co-ordinated approach across the Community to limiting carbon dioxide emissions; endorses the Government's view that further analytical work on the likely effects of any Community-wide energy/carbon tax is required before any decision on such a tax can be taken; and supports the Government's intention to continue to work towards its conditional target of returning United Kingdom carbon dioxide emissions to 1990 levels by 2005, as part of the international efforts to combat the threat of climate change. —*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

FREE MOVEMENT OF MEDICINAL PRODUCTS

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 10089/90 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of Health on 30th April 1991, and European Community Document No. 9490/91, relating to the free movement of medicinal products; and supports the Government's view that the proposals are

acceptable in principle, subject to detailed improvements to the text primarily to ensure that the health and safety of the United Kingdom human and animal populations are fully protected.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Kashmir (Human Rights)

10.46 pm

Mr. Ken Hargreaves (Hyndburn): I beg leave to present a petition to support the right of the people of Kashmir to self-determination.

It is signed by Mr. Mohammed Younis of 61 Nuttall street, Accrington and 637 others, most of them my constituents. They express their concern, which I share, about the situation in Kashmir and the failure of the world community to give the problems of Kashmir the attention which justice demands. They urge the United Nations to seek to ensure that a plebiscite, which was the subject of successful United Nations resolutions, be carried out to ascertain the will of the people of Jammu and Kashmir in relation to the state's final disposition.

The petition states:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable house will condemn the systematic mass murders, torture, arson and rape by the Indian forces of occupation in Kashmir, promote international efforts to help refugees fleeing Kashmir and to relieve the hardship and suffering of the people who remain in the territory, demand that India permit Amnesty International and other independent human rights agencies to enter Kashmir with a view to investigating and reporting on human rights violations and calls for the withdrawal of India's armed forces and security forces from the state of Jammu and Kashmir and their replacement by an interim United Nations administration with the task of restoring law and order, and as soon as practicable conducting the said plebiscite.

To lie upon the Table.

Puppies (Tail-docking)

Mr. Hargreaves: The second petition is signed by Mr. and Mrs. Smith of 312 Willows lane, Accrington and the members of the Council of Docked Breeds and

sheweth that we wish to retain our rights to dock our puppies tails as in time honoured tradition and to prevent serious damage and injury in adulthood.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House revoke the June 1991 amendment to the Veterinary Act of 1966.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Mifegyne

Mr. Hargreaves: This petition is against the drug RU486, which destroys life and risks damaging the health of women. As someone who believes that life is sacred and begins at the moment of conception, I am happy to support the petition, signed by Mr. Barrie Price of 54 Palace road, Ripon, and 47 residents of north Yorkshire. The petition says:

we the undersigned wish to note with regret that, the abortion pill Mifegyne known as RU486 has been granted a product licence. We believe that drugs and medicines should be used only to save life. We deplore the fact that this drug causes the death of unborn human beings and we express our grave concern that it will damage women physically and psychologically.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House, which is committed to upholding respect for human life and protection of the weak and vulnerable, will do

[Mr. Hargreaves]

everything possible to prevent the distribution and use of . . . RU486 and any other drug which, like it, are produced with the deliberate intention of destroying innocent human life.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Water Depletion (East Anglia)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

10.49 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the subject of drought and water depletion in East Anglia. My staff and I did not realise how much information was available and we have been positively inundated with information and technical material.

I thank my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment for attending the debate and I hope that he will respond positively to the various points I shall raise. I should also like to thank Anglian Water, the National Rivers Authority, the National Farmers Union, Norfolk county council, the Council for the Protection of Rural England and others who have provided me with a great deal of information. That has enabled me to present a speech full of material and I hope that it will stimulate debate.

The purpose of tonight's debate is to highlight the drought in East Anglia and to press for further debate, education and long-term planning so that the threat to water supplies, caused by increasing demand and possible climate change, can be averted.

It is not so many months ago that I had a debate in the early hours of the morning on global warming. There is a link between that and drought. At a recent conference at the United Nations, the organiser, Gordon Young, said:

> "A change in climate may mean changes in precipitation patterns and quantities, changes in evaporation and, consequently dramatic changes in water resources. Rivers may flow less predictably, with altered discharges."

He also said that there would be just as important consequences for ground-water supplies. The question of climate change is relevant when one thinks about the long-term future of our water supplies.

In the county of Norfolk there is increasing discussion among the press, farmers, business men and consumers about water depletion. Everywhere I go in Norfolk people continually remind me of the fact that we are, for some reason, exporting water from Norfolk via Thetford to the more populated areas of Cambridge. That is a controversial practice and people are arguing about it because it is causing concern.

The university of East Anglia's school of environmental sciences is embarking on a three-year research contract funded by the NRA. The object of that research is to look at the relationship between climate change and river flows in East Anglia over 20 years. That research will use the inter-disciplinary approach, which is a particular strength of the university. This is an opportunity to draw attention to the good work that is done at the school of environmental sciences. That research will address whether there has been a real deterioration in river flows in that 20 years.

The drought has now entered its 43rd month according to the NRA and the facts about water depletion during that time are staggering. The authority reported recently that the 41 months to the end of December proved to be the longest dry period this century with only 79 per cent. of normal rainfall. Furthermore, rainfall was below average in 32 months, average in two months and above

average in seven months only. The results of those statistics suggest that an accumulative deficit of approximately 18 inches developed during that time.

Those 18 inches represent nine full months of rainfall for the region. East Anglia has suffered in particular, because it is acknowledged to be one of the driest areas with an annual rainfall of 600 mm only. The current demand for rainfall demands 200 per cent. over the average in the next three months in order to achieve levels prevailing prior to the drought. That dramatic increase is an impossibility according to the NRA and all other groups monitoring the situation. If there were such a dramatic increase in rainfall it would cause serious flooding and other damage to the environment.

Those to whom I have spoken generally agree that there needs to be stricter control over abstraction licences. In the past few weeks when I have been studying the subject, I have become increasingly aware of the apparent abuses in the water industry involving over-abstraction. The drought has been affected by abstraction to an extent that merits further study and possible re-evaluation. The University of East Anglia has begun the process of studying the effects of gravel extraction, sewage and farming on the flow rates of the Wensum, the Nar and the Bure rivers. Its work is an important starting point for determining what has led to the drought in East Anglia, over and above the lack of rainfall. We are studying whether the drought is caused by over-use of the water supply or by population flows into the region and house building.

There is a serious lack of knowledge about domestic water conservation. I believe, as do many people, that water metering must be introduced as quickly as possible. I therefore support the campaign by the Council for the Protection of Rural England and others for better water management. I also support the idea of a two-part tariff, where charges increase for excess use, which will promote water conservation and, at the same time, be fair to less well off consumers.

I reject the argument that the cost of introducing water meters is such that it would not be worth while for individual consumers to pay that capital cost because they would not recoup it in their lifetime. We must encourage Anglian Water and water authorities throughout the country to introduce metering as fast as possible. I have some knowledge of its use in France where it works well, is popular and results in cheaper bills for many people. Let us get a move on with water metering.

Ground water extraction has reached its highest level in the history of East Anglia. The growth in extraction is a response to present and future population increases. The planning policies of the Department of the Environment and local councils have been challenged regularly in the local press, the media and local debates as the seriousness of the water supply problem has become clearer.

Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that we must look at the law and practice involved in licence distribution? The current drought, coupled with over-licensing, has severely damaged rivers and therefore streams. Over-extraction means more than water depletion. Concern is also being expressed about its effects on the ecosystem in Norfolk generally. Unfortunately, I do not have time in this short debate to give chapter and verse examples, but my hon. Friend the Minister will be aware of them, as much publicity has been given to them.

I am informed that the National Rivers Authority has granted licences to almost every application from Anglian Water over the past year, which shows the need for careful monitoring of current practices. The National Rivers Authority originally turned down an application in Norfolk on the grounds

"that the proposed increase in abstraction would significantly affect low flows in the nearby water course, and that the impact upon the fishery, local amenity and the maintenance of water quality downstream of East Rudham sewage treatment works would be unacceptable".

My hon. Friend the Minister may not be aware that his officials at the Department of the Environment reversed that decision on appeal. That causes me even more concern than the point that I put a few moments ago.

In the midst of the current drought, there has been no decline in the number of licences being distributed. There is therefore a strong case for a moratorium on all new licences until resources are allowed to replenish themselves.

A recent article in the *Eastern Daily Press*—it was written by Roger Southwell of the National Farmers Union—took up the issue of agriculture and irrigation. Time does not allow me to quote the article but it is important to realise that a long-term irrigation plan is needed. During the past few weeks I have been convinced by discussions that irrigation is important to agriculture and that it is important to educate the public to appreciate the significance of that. If irrigation were to stop, there would be higher food prices and job losses, for example. As I have said, there must be a plan for irrigation. It is not good enough to say that it can be switched on and off, as it were. There must be a long-term plan. The need for that was emphasised in the article to which I have referred. It is the NRA that imposes irrigation restrictions whereas the Anglian water authority controls the watering of gardens, golf courses and so on.

If there is difficulty in finding water for irrigation, in spite of the importance which I attach to irrigation, as do farmers in Norfolk, the authorities have a duty to provide incentives to farmers to build their own storage facilities. After all, ground water is available during the winter. It should be feasible for those who are involved in farming or horticulture to build storage facilities so that more water is available for irrigation if the effects of drought are to continue in the longer term.

The NRA had distributed a launch-of-options study, which clearly outlines a plan for future water demand management. Indeed, the purpose of my speech is to get across the idea that we need a long-term plan for water demand management and control. The NRA has produced a good report but one aspect of it disturbs me. Unfortunately, I do not have time to quote from the report, but there is constant reference to there being no single solution, to there being no great urgency and to studies taking a great deal of time. That approach concerns me. The message that I want to convey to the NRA through my hon. Friend the Minister, and perhaps in other ways, is that although the study is good, and the ideas set out in it are acceptable, it is unfortunate that it does not highlight a sense of urgency. I therefore make a plea to the NRA to show a greater sense of urgency in its approach to these matters.

If we are to solve the problems that stem from water shortage, assuming that they continue into the future as a result of climate change or population increase, or for

[Mr. Patrick Thompson]

whatever other reason, it is important that people are educated to conserve water by using water-efficient appliances and by encouraging general reductions in consumption. These are the tools that we can use to begin an effective campaign to increase public knowledge. Future home owners should be encouraged to understand the basics of water usage. A long-term conservation campaign should start now. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will have something to say about that, especially as I do not have time to say much about such a campaign.

The Council for the Protection of Rural England and the NRA, in presenting their case for demand management of water supply, have discussed the imbalance in the distribution of available water resources in different parts of the country. In the longer term, I believe that there will need to be inter-regional transfers, even if there is not a national network of pipelines. I have even heard it suggested that when the extra carriageway is built on the A1—an important north-south road—the opportunity should be taken to lay a pipeline. That makes sense. After all, the sort of transfer that I am talking about is common in the Mediterranean and in other areas. Many of us have gone sightseeing in Provence and seen the Pont du Gard and other great works built many years ago. If that could be done then, it can be done now. Long distance water transfer must be considered seriously.

While I am on the subject of major projects that may have to be considered, I would like to mention the Wash barrage. Recent correspondence in the local press has asked why, 20 years ago, we did not grasp the opportunity to build that barrage. Many of our problems of water supply and flood control in Fenland would not be costing us so much now if the requisite investment had been put into the Wash barrage some years ago.

We have an eccentric approach to public finance in this country. It may have something to do with the way in which the Treasury works. We do not seem to be able to spend big money now to save even greater expenditure in the future. I know that my hon. Friend is not in a position to respond to that more general point, but we need to think long term. If large investments are necessary for the long term, we may save ourselves money by making those investments.

The problems in East Anglia and elsewhere are the legacy of a failure to recognise the problems soon enough and to get our strategy for the future right. I hope to be able to persuade my hon. Friend and others responsible that ad hoc responses will not suffice; long-term strategic planning and action are required, in all the ways that I have mentioned in this brief survey. I look forward to my hon. Friend's response, and I thank him once again for being here.

11.7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) has done the House a service by raising this subject tonight and setting out the issues with characteristic clarity of thought and balance of argument. I welcome the opportunity to explain the problems being caused by the current dry spell both throughout the country as a whole and, more particularly, in East Anglia.

The national situation is difficult and is under constant review. Over the last three and a half years rainfall has been below average. Never since records began has a spell of this nature extended beyond two consecutive years. Nineteen eighty nine was the driest year since 1976; and the 13-month period to March 1991 was the third driest this century. The period from November 1988 to January 1992 was the driest for over 200 years in the Anglian region, an area which in average conditions is also the driest in the United Kingdom. Over the last six months, rainfall over England and Wales has been about 35 per cent. below average while the December and January rainfall was the third lowest this century. No one should be in any doubt about the scale of the challenge, therefore.

The situation next summer will be heavily influenced by the amount of rainfall over the next two months. If it is not well above average, eastern and south-east England could face a critical situation. These weather conditions, particularly in the east of England, have brought home the fact that our water is valuable and is a finite resource.

In the Water Act 1989, this Government ensured the proper stewardship of water by appointing a separate body, the National Rivers Authority, with responsibility for judicious management of resources, balancing the demands of users against the need to maintain and enhance the water environment. The NRA has clear and coherent statutory powers. The largest users of water are the water companies which, under the Act and subsequent consolidating legislation, have in their licences responsibility for the adequacy and quality of public water supplies.

What is being done to safeguard the public from the effects of dry weather? It goes without saying that, whatever else the Government can do, they cannot make it rain. If it rains heavily and consistently over the next two months, the problem will become much less widespread. If it does not, we shall be faced with another summer of restrictions and possibly shortages in many southern and eastern areas.

I must re-emphasise the roles of the NRA and the water companies. Under section 19 of the Water Resources Act 1991 The NRA has a duty to conserve, redistribute and otherwise augment water resources in England and Wales while, under section 37 of the Water Industry Act 1991, the companies must develop and maintain an efficient and economical system of water supply in their areas. My Department has a supervisory role over them, but the NRA and the water companies must play the active part by fulfilling their functions.

I have asked officials in my Department shortly to meet officials from the NRA and the water companies to discuss contingency arrangements for the areas most likely to be affected should the worst occur. What form the arrangements will take is as yet difficult to predict. It depends upon a number of factors, not least rainfall. However, I should like to mention some action that has already been taken.

While investment in the water industry declined by 27 per cent. in the last half of the 1970s, it rose by 51 per cent. in the 1980s under Conservative government and the progress made helped to produce an additional 10 gallons of water for every man, woman and child each day. That momentum is accelerating under the privatised regime.

For example, a major reservoir at Roadford in Devon was put into use in 1990. Another at Carsington, near Derby, will yield 49 million gallons per day when completed in 1993. London's water supply into the 21st century will be secured by the construction of the London water ring main, due to be completed by the mid-1990s.

A number of development options for water resources are being explored by water companies to meet local shortfalls and deal with prospective additional regional demands. These include sinking boreholes, the construction of local pipeline transfer schemes and the building of major reservoirs. The NRA has commissioned a study, to be undertaken by Sir William Halcrow and Partners, on the options for a national water resources development plan.

However, a balanced strategy must not lose sight of the importance of conservation. In the short term, and particularly in those areas worst affected by drought, water companies and the NRA have given increasing publicity to the need to use water wisely. The casual user who leaves his or her sprinkler running for hours should be made aware that this can use in one hour at least as much water as an average family uses in one day, without necessarily benefiting his garden.

In the long term, measures such as sophisticated leakage control policies are being pursued by water companies to minimise losses through leaking mains. The Office of Water Services expects suppliers to adopt the most cost-effective control measures so as to lead to the most favourable charges to customers. The director general has made it clear that he will take appropriate action to secure improvements. The NRA would wish to be satisfied that water losses have been minimised before lending support to proposals for the development of new resources.

In times of water shortages, it is important to strike a balance between competing users and the environment. The NRA has recently been liasing with those holding abstraction licences, such as the water companies and farmers in the south-east, where the shortage has been worst. In East Anglia, they are already working to the warning procedures and advice set out in a leaflet published last year.

There are various concepts of what actually constitutes East Anglia, but for the purposes of simplicity I will equate it with the area covered by Anglian Water, the largest water company in England in terms of area. That area is also the flattest and driest. It extends from the southern part of Humberside in the north to the Thames estuary in the south, and covers also most of Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire.

The company area, as I have said, had the lowest rainfall in the country, even in normal times. Over the last six months it has received only 67 per cent. of its average rainfall. It is particularly vulnerable in such times as over half its water supply is from groundwater sources. These are replenished mainly during the winter months, due to high evaporation in the summer. The current comparatively dry winter is therefore a serious blow to the avoidance of a shortage next summer, when demand will rise with the needs of agriculture and tourism. Groundwater levels are currently very low. Surface reservoir levels vary at present but are generally rather more than half full.

Anglian Water continually updates its contingency arrangements. It has reduced abstractions from depleted aquifers, even where that has entailed moving to sources with higher costs for treatment or pumping. Publicity campaigns using television, newspapers and leaflets have exhorted consumers to save water. Over the last two years, the company has spent nearly £800,000 on high-technology leak detection equipment. Over the same period, it has drilled or re-equipped many boreholes, and improved a number of water treatment works and pumping stations. Further schemes are being accelerated.

I should, perhaps, add that, although three statutory water companies within the area—Three Valleys, Cambridge and Essex—currently have hosepipe bans in force, they, and Anglian Water, felt that they are able to withstand last year's conditions without applying for a drought order.

Lastly, let me return to the question of spray irrigation. The Anglian region is the most intensively farmed and spray-irrigated area in the United Kingdom. Following over-use in 1990, MAFF and the NRA issued a leaflet entitled "Good Irrigation Practice". The leaflet describes simple precautions to avoid wasting water, and gives details of three alerts. An "amber alert" issued by the NRA warns farmers, during prolonged dry weather following periods of low rainfall, that supplies in individual catchment areas are low. A "red alert" follows at least a fortnight later, and imposes a 50 per cent. cut in the annual licensed volume of water on any single abstraction licence. The final stage—during a prolonged drought, when supplies for irrigation fall to environmentally dangerous levels—is the imposition of an indefinite ban on all spray irrigation. The alerts are issued by catchment, and are not wide-area or blanket restrictions.

The situation in the Anglian region is becoming critical and its groundwater sources could suffer from further depletion unless the next six to eight weeks are very wet. We are doing what is necessary to ensure that contingency planning is high on the agenda of all those concerned, so that, if the rain does not materialise, those responsible for water resources management, and consumers among the public and industry, can play their part in minimising the effects.

I welcomed the opportunity of reporting on those issues, afforded to me by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 25 February 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MERSEY DOCKS AND HARBOUR BILL *[Lords]*
Order for Third Reading read.
To be read the Third time on Thursday 27 February.

ABERDEEN HARBOUR ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL
Order for consideration read.
To be considered tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Education, Northumberland

1. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received about education in Northumberland.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Michael Fallon): We have received a number of representations, and on Tuesday 11 February I met a deputation which included the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith).

Mr. Beith: Has the Minister accepted the argument which was put strongly to him and to which he listened carefully that day, that it makes no sense for Northumberland to be forced by Government spending restrictions to cut £3·5 million from its education budget when it spends less per pupil than most other authorities? Will the Minister respond urgently to the constructive plea that was put to him for help through which Northumberland could ease those budgetary restrictions this year and, of course, for an eventual change in that system?

Mr. Fallon: I am looking at the specific points that were made by the delegation to me earlier this month. However, Northumberland's education spending allocation has increased by 24 per cent. over the past two years, and I see no need for any of the cuts that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

Mr. Amos: Does not my hon. Friend find it outrageous that Labour-controlled Northumberland county council has refused to accept economies of nearly £1·5 million, as identified by the Conservative and Liberal groups, and has refused to take enough money out of balances to avoid any education cuts, but at the same time it can find thousands of pounds to issue supplements in the *Hexham Courant* for party political propaganda to promote the leader of the county council, who happens to be a prospective Labour party candidate? Moreover, Labour councillors do not defend their actions; they put the county treasurer up to do it and then give him a £4,000 salary increase.

Mr. Fallon: Yes. Northumberland's Labour council leader appears to be trying to use parents and governors to further his prospective parliamentary career in Hexham by frightening people into thinking that those cuts are necessary. I repeat that there is no need for any school budget in Northumberland to be cut. The council's overall spending can rise by 5·4 per cent. in April before Northumberland risks charge capping.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: Is the Minister aware that due to the cuts that he has imposed on Northumberland county council—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Yes. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that 200 teachers are about to lose their jobs, with the result that class sizes in Northumberland will increase and under this Government the education service will take a dip?

Mr. Fallon: I think that it is now obvious to the whole House that Northumberland is playing politics with its education budget. I repeat that there is no need for any school budget in Northumberland to be cut at a time when its overall expenditure can increase by 5·4 per cent. before it risks charge capping.

Surplus School Places

2. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to intervene where local education authorities fail to take action to reduce surplus school places.

Mr. Fallon: The Government continue to press local education authorities to remove surplus places, since only they can make proposals for reorganisation. Our latest survey of school capacity shows that Wolverhampton has nearly 12,000 surplus places. We estimate that it will cost Wolverhampton more than £2 million a year to keep them empty.

Mrs. Hicks: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Pressing is not enough. Unfortunately, the Labour-controlled council in Wolverhampton continues to ignore our pressing. Does my hon. Friend agree that that money should be intended for pupils? Will he please come to the rescue of Wolverhampton parents and, if need be, intervene to ensure that Wolverhampton council manages education and does not waste money?

Mr. Fallon: I shall consider that point. Wolverhampton has the fifth highest overheads of any education authority in England. Its administration consumes more than 5 per cent. of its schools budget. Its education bureaucracy appears to cost £100 per pupil, compared with £30 next door in Solihull. At present Wolverhampton appears to employ more non-teaching staff than teachers under its education budget.

Mr. Straw: Does the Under-Secretary understand that if the Government had not embarked on the wholly cynical and two-faced policy of enticing schools with surplus places to opt out, the children at Stratford school would not now face chaos? Given that the Secretary of State's own appointed governor, the former chief inspector, Eric Bolton, said that the situation at the school

is "unsatisfactory" and that the general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers said that pupils and staff at Stratford school are "disturbed", does the Minister recognise that the Secretary of State's statement last week that Stratford school was "operating satisfactorily" had no basis in fact and could come only from a Secretary of State who sought to evade, rather than take, the responsibility which was plainly his?

Mr. Fallon: Let me give the hon. Gentleman some facts. Of the 143 grant-maintained schools to which he referred and which have been approved so far, only 23 were named in reorganisation or closure proposals. As for the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that the grant-maintained school policy might be paralysing the production of reorganisation proposals, let me tell the hon. Gentleman that in the past 12 months 150 proposals for school reorganisations were received and some 93 have so far been approved. No such proposals have been made by Wolverhampton.

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the state of affairs to which he referred in Wolverhampton has continued for about 10 years now? Has not the Labour-controlled local authority frequently made proposals for reorganisations, knowing that they would be rejected because they were highly partisan? Would it not be a good thing if the Government explained to the people of Wolverhampton, perhaps even by taking an advertisement in the *Express and Star*, that the gross overspending has continued year after year because Wolverhampton council has seen education in terms of employing people in schools, not in terms of providing good education?

Mr. Fallon: I can tell my hon. Friend that 17 of Wolverhampton's 18 secondary schools have surplus places. It is high time that Wolverhampton got round to proposing some reorganisations. As for Wolverhampton's budget, there was a serious overrun last year of some £2 million, including on the operation of something called the Jennie Lee centre. The working party's report said that the overrun on that centre

"generally reflected policy instructions that no additional cost should be involved but in specifics turned out not to be manageable".

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Exceptionally, in terms of balance, I call Mr. Dennis Turner.

Mr. Turner: Thank you for calling me, Mr. Speaker. All the interventions from the Conservative Front Bench will not save the seat of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Hicks).

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Member deal with education in Wolverhampton?

Mr. Turner: Yes, I definitely want to do that. First, I want to draw the attention of the House—*[Interruption.]* I want to ask the Minister——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Come on.

Mr. Turner: I want to ask the Minister why his two Back-Bench colleagues from Wolverhampton did not nominate the schools which they would wish to see closed or from which they would like to have surplus places taken away. In addition, I accept that the Minister is new to his Front-Bench position. Wolverhampton has already submitted two proposals for surplus places and they have been rejected by the Government.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That question was not out of order. It provided a balance.

Mr. Fallon: It is clear to the House from that sort of defence that Wolverhampton, even by the standards of Labour councils, is a pretty dreadful education authority, with the fifth highest overheads in England. Parents in Wolverhampton will want to know why the paperwork cost is £100 per pupil there, compared with only £30 per pupil down the road in Solihull.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Hicks) wants to raise the matter, she could raise it on the Adjournment.

Mrs. Hicks: Yes; thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Science

3. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much his Department plans to spend on science in 1992-93.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): In 1992-93 the science budget will total £1,050 million.

Mr. Strang: I direct the right hon. and learned Gentleman's attention to the Government's overall spending on research and development. Will he address himself to the fact that no less than 44 per cent. of all Government-funded research and development has a military purpose and next year that figure is due to rise to 48 per cent? How can that be right?

Mr. Clarke: Obviously, military research is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, but I am sure that he would argue, as I would, that there is considerable civilian spin-off from all the advances made in the development of military equipment, and that includes the consequences for the electronics industry and others. I have just described the level of the science budget in my Department, which is spent for civil research purposes on environmental, medical, scientific, engineering, economic and social research. That amount has just passed £1 billion per annum for the first time, representing a real terms increase of 2·5 per cent. this year, and we have given the research councils a rising profile for expenditure in future years. We are also expanding our efforts in civil science. The defence expenditure to which the hon. Gentleman referred has considerable benefits for the scientific world and for British industry.

Mr. Rowe: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that, no matter how large the science budget of his Department may be, it will be a great waste of money in the future if there are no young people interested in science? Does he agree that when Kent County Engineering Society recently held a seminar for primary school heads and local businesses, it turned out that not a single local business had thought of trying to interest

primary school children in science and engineering. Surely, it is at that age that interest has to be aroused because later those subjects will fall on the other side of the divide.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. We have to interest more young people in scientific and engineering education and training. The development of the national curriculum will do a great deal to stimulate more interest in science because more pupils will have to sustain well-judged scientific programmes of study until at least the age of 16. Although we have now developed good links between business and secondary schools where companies try to interest pupils, we do not yet have enough tie-ups between primary schools and local businesses. I agree that more businesses should contemplate approaching younger children and at an early stage arousing their interest in what science or engineering may hold for them.

Dr. Bray: Will the Secretary of State keep in this country what James Watson, the discoverer of the DNA basis of the genetic code, has described as the jewel in the crown of British science? Will he authorise the Medical [illegible]arch Council to plan on the basis that the funding needed by Dr. John Sulston of the laboratory of molecular biology of Cambridge will be available to keep in this country work on the nematode project, as that work is the foundation of the human genome project which is the foundation of the future of medical research and biotechnology? Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that the United States has made a bid for that work? If funding is not available, and it cannot be found within the present budget, the Secretary of State will be guilty of the loss of that work?

Mr. Clarke: With the greatest respect, it would be a pathetic science policy that suggested that the Secretary of State of the day should intervene to give funds to named scientists—whose names, no doubt, the hon. Gentleman picked up from cuttings in the learned journals. Science nowadays is an international community and British science is pre-eminent in the world. We are one of the leading science nations and we attract many more talented people to this country than we lose. It is no good citing one or two cases. The Medical Research Council will no doubt consider particular claims on scientific merits to counter the fact that Britain has achieved great success in science because of the increasing sums that the Government have made available for that purpose.

Mr. Hill: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that one of the best universities in the United Kingdom for scientific research is Southampton university? It is second to none and it is grateful that the figures that have been released today show that it will receive 10·2 per cent. of its budget for research. I am sure that that money will be used with the utmost effect to promote more and more scientific developments at Southampton university.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is right to remind us that the Universities Funding Council has considerable funds which it receives from the Government and distributes partially for research-based purposes. This year, the funds have been allocated very much according to the UFC's grading of the quality of research carried out at each university. I congratulate Southampton university on its success in obtaining funds way ahead of the rate of inflation in order to sustain and increase the work that it carries out.

Further Education Programmes

4. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to improve access, facilities and learning programmes in the further education service for people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Alan Howarth): The Further and Higher Education Bill currently before Parliament will ensure that a wide range of educational provision for students with disabilities and learning difficulties is maintained and developed in the new further education sector.

Mr. McMaster: Does the Minister agree that life-long education is a right, not a privilege, and that it should not be any less of a right just because a person happens to be disabled? Is the Minister aware that many disabled people are concerned that their rights will be reduced if further education colleges are taken out of local authority control? Does the Minister agree with the almost unanimous view of the disability lobby that the best way to protect the rights of disabled people would be to introduce anti-discrimination legislation now?

Mr. Howarth: I can offer the hon. Gentleman the reassurance that he seeks. The Bill places clear duties on the further education funding councils to cater for people with learning difficulties and those councils will be required to allocate resources to discharge those duties. It is for the councils to determine how they distribute funding, but the Bill gives the councils wide powers to be used in support of students with special education needs. The Government will ensure that no less than the existing level of resources will continue to be available in the new further education structure and that funding will be apportioned between local education authorities and the funding councils in line with their responsibilities for securing the provision of further education.

Binary Divide

5. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the consequences for research funding of ending the binary divide.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The new framework for higher education will require funding for basic and strategic research in each subject to be allocated selectively to high-quality departments. All institutions will be free to compete for selective research funding.

Mr. Edwards: I am grateful to the Minister, but is there not a danger that there could be an unfair distribution of funding research between the new universities, which will be formed from polytechnics, and the traditional universities? Is there not concern that there could be inequity in the distribution of research funding to Welsh and English institutions? What will the Minister do to ensure that Wales gets a fair deal in research?

Mr. Howarth: The Government's policy remains as set out in the White Paper on higher education. Funding will be based on an assessment of individual departments. Some departments in an institution will do well, while others will do less well, according to the assessment of their research quality. But institutions right across the new unified higher education sector will be free to compete on fair terms, and the same will apply in Wales.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my hon. Friend accept that universities with a strong research base need fear nothing from the end of the binary divide? Does he further accept that the Universities Funding Council has acknowledged the excellence of research at Lancaster university by giving it a 10·9 per cent. increase in funding for the coming year?

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those remarks. The Universities Funding Council is carrying out the policy, in response to the White Paper, of distributing funding according to assessments of research quality department by department. I share my hon. Friend's pleasure and offer my congratulations to Lancaster university on achieving a 10·9 per cent. increase in research funding for the forthcoming year.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Does the Minister appreciate that, with the phasing out of the student-related element of university research funding, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals is actively canvassing the introduction of top-up fees? I understand that Birmingham university council is due to consider the matter tomorrow. Will the Government take action to stop the charging of top-up fees, or will they allow universities to go down the road of pay-as-you-learn?

Mr. Howarth: I should have hoped that the hon. Gentleman would respect the principle of academic autonomy. He cannot have it both ways. He cannot profess, as he likes to do, his respect for the autonomy of academic institutions and at the same time seek to limit their management discretion. I emphasise that we believe, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has said, that top-up fees should be unnecessary because we have planned, and continue to plan, to provide sufficient public funding to support the expansion of high-quality teaching in our universities. Moreover, we regard such fees as undesirable because we are keen that there should be no avoidable barriers to access on the part of people who have not traditionally had the opportunity to go into higher education.

Technical Education

6. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress is being made in the promotion of technical education.

8. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the building and equipment needs for technical education.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Tim Eggar): The Government are promoting technical and vocational education through a wide range of measures. They include the introduction of technology as a subject for all pupils from the age of five to 16 and of an improved range of vocational qualifications; the establishment of city technology colleges and of a network of technology schools; and new freedom and flexibility for our further education colleges.

Mr. Stevens: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the £25 million technology schools initiative to further technical education in schools. Does he agree that such initiatives help to give young people a better start and help to provide the type of recruits needed by industry? Does he further agree that Labour Members' knee-jerk opposition to city technology colleges shows their obsession with standardisation rather than with improving the quality of education in schools?

Mr. Eggar: I agree with my hon. Friend about the widespread support for the technology schools initiative, with 89 local education authorities having submitted bids. In addition, in a number of LEA areas where it had been decided, mainly for doctrinaire reasons, not to submit bids, we have received individual bids from schools.

Further to my hon. Friend's final remarks, it should come as no surprise to him or to anybody else that Labour Members are opposed to choice. They are committed to abolishing city technology schools, grammar schools and the assisted places scheme, and they have no time for parental choice.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Does my hon. Friend share with me some anger that 19 Labour authorities still have not even bothered to bid for the funds that are available? Does he agree that that contrasts with the breath of fresh air that is now flowing through our universities and polytechnics? The universities have attracted large sums—more than £700 million of additional funding—for the current year, and our polytechnics likewise, now that they are independent of the stifling hand of Labour authorities—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Supplementary questions must be brief.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Will the Minister pledge total support for the Nottingham city technology college for doing just what our young people and the nation need?

Mr. Eggar: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. I visited the Djanogly college and was impressed with the quality of education offered to so many young people. It was interesting to note that so many heads of secondary schools, in Nottinghamshire and elsewhere, are coming to see what has been achieved at Djanogly college and to learn the lessons from it. With regard to bids to become technology schools, my hon. Friend will be heartened by the quality of the bids that we have received from individual schools, including some exceptionally good schools in Labour-controlled areas.

Mr. Cousins: Does the Minister accept that, as there are now 50 different definitions of a professional engineer, it is unrealistic for the Minister's Department to tell Newcastle council, which put in two bids for technology schools, that it should have submitted only one. Does the Minister agree that, to tackle such antique snobbery, two bids from one city should be allowed?

Mr. Eggar: I shall look into the matter because I recognise that Newcastle is a Labour authority that has put aside its doctrinaire opposition to technology schools. So far as I am aware, Newcastle local education authority

is as free to submit two bids to the Department as any other local education authority. I assure the hon. Gentleman that those bids, when received, will be evaluated in comparison with other bids. If he is genuinely concerned that Newcastle has been prevented from putting in more than one bid, I shall look into the matter for him.

Mr. Cryer: Does the Minister not think it unfair to spend £7 million on a city technology college in Bradford, when that amount equals the sum spent on the nearly 300 publicly owned schools in Bradford? As the Minister should know, those schools are very much in need of large-scale capital expenditure. Many of them are of a Victorian standard and need considerable investment. Does he agree that the schools in Bradford provide a perfectly good technical education and that they need to be built on and improved, rather than being attacked by diverting public funds into city technology colleges?

Mr. Eggar: I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman has visited the city technology college in Bradford. Indeed, he has refused invitations to do so. That college provides an excellent education to many pupils in Bradford. Parents are extremely keen to have their children admitted to the college because they want them to take advantage of the excellent education that it offers. The hon. Gentleman should take more time to encourage schools in Bradford to learn the lessons from the city technology college to improve the quality of technology education in Bradford. He should also have words with his colleague, Councillor John Ryan, who needs to improve the quality of his submissions to my Department for funding from central Government.

Mrs. Currie *rose*——

Hon. Members: "Hear, hear!"

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Currie: Is my hon. Friend aware that some of the finest technical education in Europe is given to the 7,000 students of the Derbyshire college of higher education? Its bid to become a polytechnic has been supported for many years by Conservative Members from Derbyshire. Is my hon. Friend aware that, as polytechnics are to disappear, we now support its bid to become a university? Will he ensure that everything possible is done so that Derbyshire can have its first opportunity to have a university, in contrast with Nottingham which will have two, Leicester which will have three, and Loughborough which will have one? At present, Derbyshire has none.

Mr. Eggar: I am aware of the strong support from my hon. Friend and other Derbyshire Members for that development. The position has been clearly explained to the college in Derby and I am sure that it will pursue the opportunities.

Primary Education

7. **Mr. Bidwell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has arising out of the report on primary education by Alexander, Rose and Woodhead.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I commissioned the report to stimulate debate within the teaching profession and in primary schools about how best to deliver the national curriculum and to raise standards. The effective introduction of the national curriculum will require changes in practice in many schools and the report will assist the teachers concerned in planning the necessary changes.

Mr. Bidwell: I welcome the right and learned Gentleman to the Dispatch Box—I did not think that he was going to answer this question as he looked a bit tired sitting on the Bench there. I am glad that he did answer it, as I wanted to ask him this: has he learnt any lessons from the report, particularly those related to ability streaming? He is known to have favoured that, but it is rejected by the report as a

"a crude device which cannot do justice to the different abilities a pupil may show in different subjects and contexts".

Mr. Clarke: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has read the report. If he were to read it with a less selective eye, he would benefit considerably. He would discover that the report advocates the grouping of pupils according to ability in many circumstances, in order to place the pupil in a specific ability group for a particular purpose as that is a more flexible device for teaching older children in a number of subjects. I hope that he and other members of the Labour party will eventually be talked out of their past commitment to mixed ability teaching at all levels, for, as the three wise men have confirmed, that is not suitable for delivering the broad and balanced curriculum at which the Government are aiming.

Mr. Pawsey: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that Conservative Members welcome the report of the three wise men? Does he further agree that the report condemns the trendy, discredited methods put forward by Labour and calls for a return to traditional teaching? What plans does my right hon. and learned Friend have to implement the report, and what is the time scale likely to be?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is right. The report stated that the progress of primary pupils had been hampered by the influence of highly questionable dogmas, which had led to excessively complex classroom practices and devalued the place of subjects in the curriculum.

My hon. Friend is right to say that the Labour party has been closely associated with the development of those dogmas over many years. We are circulating the report to all primary schools so that primary school teachers can benefit from its advice. The National Curriculum Council will take account of the report in monitoring and reviewing the manageability of the national curriculum. The Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education is to advise me on the implications of the report for primary initial teacher training in future. I intend to use the report to review the present arrangements for the induction of newly qualified teachers and in-service training. Considerable changes are required in classroom practice in many of our primary schools if we are to raise standards to the levels demanded by today's society and parents. The Government are determined to raise those standards, and the report will be a valuable instrument to enable us to do so.

Ms. Armstrong: Does the Secretary of State accept that there is now evidence that standards in the basics, which the report identified as the key skills on which other learning depends, have fallen? Does he further accept that

the report identifies that there has been serious disturbance in primary schools in recent years? Will he abandon his ideological dictation from the centre and work with teachers to bring in the changes in the curriculum for which the report calls?

Mr. Clarke: First, I personally do not accept that there is any evidence such as the hon. Lady describes. I find it odd that the position has so changed compared with 15 months ago when I became Secretary of State, when some Conservative Members were alleging that standards had declined and Opposition Members were denying those allegations. The recent report of the National Foundation for Educational Research did not attribute any decline to the national curriculum; the interpretation placed on it by the hon. Lady and her hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell) is based on a deliberate misreading of the report.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Will the Secretary of State explain how he was able to commission a review of teaching methods in a matter of a few weeks, although his minimum standards—first laid down in 1981—were not met in the 10 years that the Government allowed themselves, and the current review will not now report until the autumn? Is it fair to assume that, in this general election year, the right hon. and learned Gentleman expects the review to lead to a cut in the Government's minimum standards for education facilities, designed to meet the requirements of the national curriculum?

Mr. Clarke: Most of the minimum standards have been met. As the hon. Gentleman has said, the review will go ahead in the autumn.

The reason why the "three wise men" report was produced so quickly is that the three people whom I invited to deliver it—Mr. Alexander, Mr. Rose and Mr. Woodhead—had behind them a lifetime of experience and close involvement with primary schools, and they were able to distil that lifetime's knowledge very rapidly. As far as I am aware, no one has criticised my choice of those three experts, or challenged their conclusions. It is slightly absurd for people to pretend that the "three wise men" report is anything other than a valuable contribution to the raising of standards in our schools.

City Technology Colleges

9. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many pupils attend city technology colleges.

Mr. Eggar: Currently, we estimate that there are some 8,000 pupils benefiting from a CTC education.

Mr. Bowden: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that city technology colleges provide a real alternative education for children in the inner city? Is he aware that in south-east London—and serving my Dulwich constituency—is Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college, which has received more than 800 applications for 180 places? Is that not proof positive that CTCs are popular both with parents and with pupils?

Mr. Eggar: I agree. The popularity of all the CTCs is beyond challenge. Despite deep and unremitting opposition from, in particular, the Labour-controlled councils of Lewisham and Southwark, Haberdashers' Aske's CTC has succeeded in attracting an overwhelming amount of interest from parents. My only regret is that the college is not able to take more of my hon. Friend's constituents.

Mr. Flannery: Surely the Minister—and all the other Ministers and other Tory Members—know that the CTCs are really private schools, siphoning off millions of pounds of public money. Is it not true—as my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) pointed out—that as much public money goes to one CTC, to which parents who have not gone through the normal process will have access, as to all the other schools in the area, and that it goes there at the same rate? The other schools have to share little or nothing while the city technology college gets the lot—and it is public money.

Mr. Eggar: I imagine that this may well be the hon. Gentleman's last contribution to Education Question Time. I note that his question was as full of ideological claptrap as all the others that he has asked during his career in the House.

Further Education

10. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress is being made with plans to give further education and sixth-form colleges more independence.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Excellent progress is being made with our plans, which are the subject of the Further and Higher Education Bill currently before Parliament, to give colleges independence from local authority control.

Mr. Amess: Following the visit of our hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar) to Basildon last Friday, will my right hon. and learned Friend endorse our hon. Friend's statement that the independence that we are offering colleges of further education and sixth-form colleges such as Basildon's will enable them to be more effective, efficient and flexible than they can be at present? Will my right hon. and learned Friend agree to visit Basildon this year to observe the excellent education standards enjoyed by my constituents?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend the Minister of State was very impressed by his visit to Basildon, and I should certainly be interested in visiting it myself if and when my diary allowed it.

I have visited sixth-form colleges in Thurrock and Boston this year, and I recently addressed the annual meeting of the Association of Colleges for Further and Higher Education. I agree that the colleges are looking forward to their independence and to expanding the opportunities for further education available to our young people. I find that they bitterly regret the Labour party's dogmatic commitment to repeal, contrary to the wishes of the college principals, the Bill going through the House precisely because the Opposition Front Bench are acting at the behest of a few backwoodsmen Labour county councillors throughout the country.

Mr. Fatchett: The Secretary of State will be aware that further education colleges charge their students for certain activities related to the curriculum—not tuition fees, but other activities. When the Bill goes through, if it does, sixth-form colleges will have the same freedom. Will the Secretary of State now give a guarantee that no sixth-form

college student will be charged for activities in relation to the school curriculum, or is this to be yet another example of pay-as-you-learn under the Conservative Government?

Mr. Clarke: I know of no realistic reason for expecting any sixth-form college to introduce charges of the kind described. Sixth-form colleges will be funded on the basis that they carry on with their present practice. I have not met a college principal who intends to change that practice. The hon. Gentleman is merely trying to raise obscure scares about our proposals when he knows from his own visit to the association that the policy is extremely popular with all the principals and that his statement—that the colleges would be given back to his friends in Labour councils—was greeted with widespread dismay there.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Kilfoyle:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Prime Minister recently told the House that the British economy had grown faster than any other in Europe, when it has not; he said that the Japanese economy was in recession, when it is not; and he said that German unemployment was over 3 million, when it is not. Given that series of gaffes, will he now compound his confusion and tell us that he bears no personal responsibility for the appalling slump that is devastating Britain today?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, there is a recession in a number of countries. I quote from what Sir Allen Sheppard of Grand Met said yesterday:

"One thing which no one could predict a year ago was exactly how long the recession would last . . . This recession has not been an exclusively British phenomenon—as some people would have us believe. It is a worldwide problem; only last week we heard the news that Europe's strongest economy, Germany, had slowed down."

Those are not my words, but those of Sir Allen Sheppard of Grand Met.

Sir Peter Blaker: Will my right hon. Friend consult his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster about the attempt being made to steal the emblem of the duchy? Is he aware that on a previous occasion when such an attempt was made, the miscreant—an imposter named Lambert Simnel, who attempted to steal the red rose from King Henry VII—was not only defeated but sentenced to serve as a scullion in the royal kitchens? What does my right hon. Friend think would be the appropriate sentence now?

The Prime Minister: It is difficult to find anything entirely appropriate. Perhaps continuous service as Leader of the Opposition would do.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister recall saying a short time ago in his personal statement—in this document from the Conservative party—that "if" Government

"borrowing takes the strain, taxes . . . have to go up"

Does he still take that view?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I was Chief Secretary for two years and Chancellor for one year. Because of the repayments that were made of borrowing during that period, in the midst of a recession we are now in a better position to borrow prudently—*[Interruption.]* than we have been at any stage in the past: to borrow prudently and to maintain our commitment to a balanced budget in the medium term. Before the right hon. Gentleman reflects further, he may recall that the borrowing requirement was 9½ per cent. of GDP under the last Labour Government—the equivalent to borrowing today £55 billion.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister is now borrowing billions to try to finance a pre-election tax cut, so will he tell us exactly which other taxes he would raise to pay for the bribe?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman knows very well that I cannot prejudge my right hon. Friend's Budget, and I have no intention of doing so. He should also realise that tax is levied on people's own money: it does not belong to the Government; it is their money that the Government compulsorily take away from them in taxation. Taxation levels determine how much. We know that the right hon. Gentleman would add to taxation, for he needs to in order to sustain his promises.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister said a very short time ago that "If" Government

"borrowing takes the strain, taxes—not just our taxes"—

[HON. MEMBERS: "We have heard this before."] And you are going to hear it again: "If" Government

"borrowing takes the strain, taxes—not just our taxes but the next generation's too—have to go up."

Does not the Prime Minister think that he owes it to the country to say exactly which other taxes he would put up to pay for his bribe?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman should have done a little more research. If he had done a little more research and had seen the evidence that I gave to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee in 1987, he would have seen then—when we had a fiscal surplus of many billions—that I indicated that it would be right, in a downturn, to borrow money in a recession. Would the right hon. Gentleman prefer to do what Labour last did—cut the hospital building programme and cut the other programmes? That is what it did before.

Mr. William Powell: I thank my right hon. Friend for coming to Corby last Friday to open the magnificent Brooke city technology college. Does he agree that this type of secondary school has a substantial part to play in the future education of our children in the secondary sector, and will he encourage the development of further city technology colleges in our country?

The Prime Minister: I certainly enjoyed my visit to the Brooke city technology college last week. It is an excellent establishment and has attracted a good deal of support and resources from the private sector. I think that that is the sort of choice that parents want for their children, and it widens the opportunities in education. It is inexplicable to me that the Labour party would wish to stop this continuing and successful experiment.

Q2. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tueday 25 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Ewing: As the Prime Minister has now had time to appreciate the significance that Scots attach to the phrase "taking stock", will he elaborate on what that means in the Scottish constitutional set-up? Is it an affirmation of what his junior energy Minister says: that it will be acceptable for the Scottish Office to be staffed by Members from constituencies south of the border, or of what his Foreign Secretary and Secretary of State for Scotland have said in the past 24 hours: that nothing will happen, or is he considering the possibility of affording the Scottish people the right to determine their own future in a democratic fashion? Will there be a referendum or any other mechanism to establish a Scottish Parliament?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady's party seeks isolation for Scotland. I do not believe that that prescription is in the interests of Scotland or of the rest of the United Kingdom. I said that we would be taking stock, and I meant precisely that—taking stock on the basis of an increased vote in Scotland, on the basis of more Members of Parliament for Scotland and on ways of seeking to increase the strength of the Union. That is what I mean by taking stock.

Mr. Dover: Is the Prime Minister aware that millions of people are fed up with having to pay extra community charge to cover those who do not pay? Will he encourage all local authorities to ensure that people pay their bills promptly and will he ensure that future charges are reduced when that money comes into council coffers?

The Prime Minister: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend that we need to pursue those who do not pay the community charge and, in particular, we should pursue those Members of the House who do not pay the community charge and set a bad example to everyone else.

Q3. **Mr. Chris Smith:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Smith: Does the Prime Minister agree with the proposition that it is entirely sensible for a Government to borrow prudently in order to fund capital investment to build economic recovery but that it is sheer folly for a Government to borrow in order to buy votes for an election? Would that not be fiscal philandering of the worst kind?

The Prime Minister: Without in any way prejudging what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will do in the Budget, I seem to recall that the last Labour Government —on the back of a huge borrowing requirement—cut taxes just in advance of the 1979 election. But if the hon. Gentleman wants to know about investment, let me give him some information about investment. We now have the largest investment programme of capital investment in the national health service that we have ever had. Next year hospital spending in capital terms will be 75 per cent. up on the last year of the Labour Government. Those are the fruits of an improved economy over the last 10 years.

Mr. Tracey: Will my right hon. Friend restate his commitment to the assisted places scheme in our schools, which is an extremely cost-effective way of sending children of high ability to good schools? Is it not short-sighted for both Opposition parties to be pledged to the abolition of this scheme?

The Prime Minister: It is an extremely popular scheme, as my hon. Friend knows. We will sustain that scheme in the next Parliament. The Opposition parties would abolish it, given the chance.

Q4. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Williams: Having been Chief Secretary to the Treasury before becoming Chancellor, and Chancellor before becoming Prime Minister, is the Prime Minister really trying to tell us that he bears no responsibility whatever for the recession? Why is the Prime Minister continually trying to blame everyone else when it is his own errors of judgment, mistakes and economic incompetence that have produced the current recession?

The Prime Minister: I think that the hon. Gentleman builds too much on too little. I made it clear on a number of occasions over recent years that there was, in retrospect, one change that I wish we had not made at the time, but it was one that was urged on us by right hon. Gentlemen opposite. That was the reduction of interest rates immediately on the back of the stock exchange crash, but, as the hon. Gentleman knows, we were urged to cut them even more by the Leader of the Opposition and the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). What responsibility will they accept for that?

Mr. Butcher: Can my right hon. Friend give a guarantee that he will never propose the introduction of unnecessary and expensive regional assemblies in England and Wales? Does he agree that when Opposition parties advocate such bodies they do so with the entirely cynical objective of maintaining the over-representation of Scotland in this House in the aftermath of the dog's breakfast called devolution?

The Prime Minister: Such assemblies are neither wanted nor needed, and we will not propose them.

Q5. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thompson: Is the Prime Minister aware that since 1979 the crime figures in England and Wales have gone up by 102 per cent., that in the north of England they have gone up by 123 per cent. and that in the Northumbria police force area—my area—robberies have gone up by 240 per cent. and criminal damage by 238 per cent? The Home Office is advising the police to increase the number of officers while at the same time the Department of the Environment is capping local authorities' spending. How does the Prime Minister square that circle?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman is so concerned about law and order, perhaps he could explain to me why his party refuses to support the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act, which was introduced initially by a Labour Government and is now opposed by a Labour Opposition. He might also have mentioned in his remarks that spending on law and order is up by 80 per cent. in real terms and that there are 15,500 more police officers, whereas Labour left the police force under establishment by 7,000 when it left office. Labour has opposed our measures which have led to stiffer sentences, it would shackle the police with political controls and its answer to rising crime is to blame everyone except the criminal.

Offending on Bail

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement.

The number of those who commit an offence while on bail has risen. We estimate that, of the nearly 500,000 people granted court bail last year, about 50,000 were convicted of an offence committed while on bail. Five years ago, the figure was about 35,000. That represents a serious problem, especially for the police.

The offender who commits an offence while on bail is likely to be a male aged between 17 and 20, and charged with property crime, usually car crime and burglary. We must crack down on those bail bandits.

The Government are determined that the courts and the police should have the powers that they need. I am, therefore, announcing a package of six measures today.

We intend to change the law in two ways. First, it is right that a person who commits an offence while on bail should normally receive a more severe penalty. We will introduce legislation to require courts to consider offending on bail as an aggravating factor when passing sentence. Secondly, the police need clear statutory power to arrest people immediately who breach police bail. We will introduce legislation to secure that.

Those measures taken together represent a considerable toughening of the existing law, but we intend to go further to deal with the hard core who persistently reoffend.

Our third measure, therefore, is to ensure that people who are granted bail are left in no doubt of the risks that they run if they break their bail conditions or offend while on bail. We are asking all magistrates courts to ensure that the bail notices issued to all defendants make it crystal clear that if they fail to answer bail, or fail to comply with the conditions imposed, or if they commit an offence while on bail, they risk being remanded in custody. The courts have extensive powers to impose stringent conditions on bail. I am confident that they will make full use of them and that they will tighten up the arrangements for supervision.

Fourthly, we need to ensure that the courts have the fullest information when they decide whether to grant bail so that they can pick out more accurately the bad risks. We therefore intend this year to set up in selected local areas —including the inner cities—bail information projects which will ensure that information from the police, from the Crown prosecution service and from the probation service is collated and available to the courts. That builds on the bail information schemes which we have in 113 courts and 13 prisons, and which in due course will be backed up by a new computerised criminal record system.

Fifthly, magistrates have the difficult task of taking decisions each day of the week in this complex area of risk assessment. The Judicial Studies Board has therefore agreed to review the training of magistrates in the criteria set out in the Bail Act 1976.

Sixthly, experience shows that some defendants will behave on bail if, and only if, they are properly supervised. We will provide £8 million over the next three years for bail accommodation and support.

Well-run bail hostels reduce the risk of offending. There are 29 such hostels with 600 places, and a further 82 approved probation bail hostels providing 1,800 places. An additional 800 places will be provided by April 1995. This programme will also include innovative schemes aimed at keeping defendants out of crime.

I am grateful for the efforts police forces have made to bring information to bear on this subject. We shall work closely with them to provide regular and reliable information about offending on bail.

I am asking my officials as a matter of urgency to consult fully with the police, the Crown prosecution service, the magistrates courts service, the social services departments and the probation service to implement the steps I have announced this afternoon. Together they will make a direct impact on the problem of offending while on bail.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): In order to put his statement in perspective, will the Home Secretary confirm that the document prepared by his Department a month ago made clear that 82 per cent. of all offenders remanded on bail do not commit a second offence, and that the essential requirement for reforming the system is better ways of selecting those who should receive bail and those who should not? It would be helpful if the Home Secretary endorsed the view of his Department that errors are made in both directions.

There is much in the Home Secretary's statement which we are glad to welcome. It is right that the courts should be helped to distinguish between good and bad risks, and that defendants granted bail should be left in no doubt of the risk they take if they offend a second time or break their bail conditions. It is equally right that the police be provided with a statutory right to arrest offenders who are in breach of their bail conditions.

We also welcome the announcement of additional bail hostel places. Indeed, we have been advocating that for some time. We note with particular pleasure the introduction of what the Home Secretary called

"innovative schemes aimed at keeping defendants out of crime".

Such schemes have been advocated in Labour party policy documents and have previously been dismissed by Government spokesmen as an indication that we are soft on crime.

Before I ask the Home Secretary specific questions about the legislation, may we be told why the Government have belatedly changed their mind on the issue? Last August, in Sunderland, the Minister of State said that he doubted very much

"that an additional prosecution for having committed an offence while on bail would have any deterrent effect at all."

What has happened to change the Secretary of State's mind?

While the Home Secretary ponders that, I will ask him two specific questions on legislation. First, if a defendant is charged while on bail, has he committed an aggravated offence even if he is found not guilty on the original charge? Secondly, will a defendant who is charged with a second offence have to wait for sentencing on the first offence until the trial for the other offence has been completed? Would it not have been much simpler in every way if the Home Secretary had taken action to ensure that offences committed while on bail simply attracted more severe sentences?

Why have the Government waited so long, and until so late, to introduce these measures? What we see today is another attempt—wholly characteristic of the Home Secretary—to influence headlines rather than to reduce

crime. Had he been serious about the task, he would have announced today the implementation of the Morgan report, his own report prepared for him and presented to him, giving ways in which crime could be reduced. He has chosen not to take action on that report because he does not regard it as sufficiently publicity worthy. That is no way for a Home Secretary to behave.

Mr. Baker: On the last point, the Morgan report is out for consultation, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. I have searched carefully for references in the right hon. Gentleman's recent speeches urging me to take action on reoffending on bail, and I cannot find anything at all.

The right hon. Gentleman began by referring to research. I see that, in his remarks this morning, he intimated that some of the research might have been exaggerated. I can only say to him that, only a fortnight ago, I had a meeting with northern Labour Members led by the Labour Chief Whip, who urged me to take on board the research—the 40 per cent. figure that the right hon. Gentleman condemned utterly this morning—and to introduce measures. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will listen to his Chief Whip and that they will sort out exactly what their combined approach is.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me some specific questions. As regards sentencing for the aggravated offence, the law will have to be changed. The courts will have available to them the possibility of imposing a further and higher sentence as a result of the changes that we are making. I repeat that that will require a change in the law. The extra sentence will be added, as it were, when the second offence has been clarified; if the defendant is found not guilty of the second offence, there clearly cannot be an additional sentence.

The right hon. Gentleman's other question was about sentencing.

Mr. Hattersley: Why has the Minister of State changed his mind?

Mr. Baker: We have not changed our minds. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman would care to remind himself of what we have said today. What we have done is to bring forward a series of measures to identify those who have the greatest risk of reoffending on bail. It has always been our intention under the Criminal Justice Act 1991 to ensure that society is protected from those who reoffend. As I have said, 50,000 defendants reoffend while on bail. That represents a substantial increase in recent years, and the measures announced today address that problem. I do not believe that, if the right hon. Gentleman had responsibility for my office, he would have introduced such measures at all. As I have said, he has a capacity to talk strongly and act weakly.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we will be subject to a timetable motion later this afternoon. I will allow questions to continue until 4.15 pm, then there will be a ten-minute Bill and then we must move on to the main debate. May I ask for questions that are brief and to the point?

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): My right hon. Friend is quite right to respond to the genuine concern of the police about reoffending on bail because the true number of people who offend on bail is unknown. My right hon. Freind's commitment to bail hostels and bail information schemes is particularly important because that will enable the magistrates, who have the most difficult administrative duty to perform in making the decision, to be better informed in deciding who should be held in custody and who on remand.

Mr. Baker: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend who, in his previous responsibilities, had direct experience of the matter. The important impact of the measures that I have announced is that the information available to the courts will be improved considerably, and that includes information from the Crown prosecution service, the police, the probation service and social workers, so that those most likely to reoffend and those who have a record of reoffending can be identified and action can be taken. They can be remanded in custody certainly but they can also be remanded in bail hostels. That is an important alternative because offenders who are likely to reoffend on bail will have some supervision if they are committed to a bail hostel.

The record of bail hostels is very successful. The rate of absconding or reoffending on the part of those committed to bail hostels is very low. I am glad that we are committed to a major programme of expansion—some 800 places over the next three years.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Although the measures announced by the Home Secretary are welcome, does he accept that they are also extremely modest and that their impact upon the 50,000 reoffenders is not likely in a year's time to attract the headline to the effect that the so-called crackdown on bail bandits has produced the result that the Home Secretary will no doubt wish to trumpet? The bail hostels programme that the right hon. Gentleman has described will provide only an additional 800 places, although he seeks to catch some 50,000 offenders. Is he satisfied that the magistrates will accept his views about how they should exercise their discretion? Has he in fact consulted magistrates at all?

Mr. Baker: I remind the hon. Gentleman that there are 600 bail hostel places, 1,800 probation bail places, and there will be a further 800 bail hostel places—a substantial increase. The measures that I announced this afternoon are not modest: they are a substantial change. It requires a change in the law, introducing the consideration of the court to take in as an aggravating circumstance the fact that someone has reoffended on bail. That is a substantial and significant change, and I have been pressed by the police forces for some time to introduce it.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement will be warmly welcomed by the federated ranks of the police, particularly the power to deal with those who breach police bail and the powers of the courts to award additional sentences? Will the tightening of the custody rules, for example, enable the police to detain a suspect in police cells and then bring that suspect forward at the first available court sitting? That problem has caused great concern within the police for many months. If that procedure could be arranged, it would be very welcome.

Will my right hon. Friend look at the problem of absconding from bail hostels at night? There is some

[Mr. Michael Shersby]

evidence to suggest that those who are confined in bail hostels are able to go out rather too easily after the hours of darkness and commit further offences.

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend's second point is a matter for the managers of bail hostels and the local probation committees. Certainly the ones that I have visited—and I have visited several in the country—are very well managed. As I have said, they have very little trouble with absconding or reoffending.

As to police bail, after arrest, if they do not give a defendant bail to appear before a court, the police may give him bail to return to a police station at a given date, after which he may be dealt with by charge, by formal caution, or there may be no further action. That is prior, of course, to the court bail. If he fails to return to the police station, it is an offence, but the police have no power to arrest him for it. We propose to bring in legislation so that the police have such a power, and the police have pressed us to do that.

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): Are not the bail information provisions which the right hon. Gentleman has just announced a dismal confession of failure? If the probation service, the Crown prosecution service, the police and the courts were adequately resourced, would there be a problem of providing the courts with information?

Mr. Baker: There has been a substantial increase in the funding of courts and of the Crown prosecution service over the years. Indeed, we have appointed an additional 160 judges and opened more than 180 additional court rooms over the past 12 years. At the same time we have improved bail information schemes. As I have said, we have 113 such schemes, and 13 operating in prisons. I am keen to improve even further the flow of information and the exchange of information between the various agencies involved. That is why we are setting up projects, some in the inner cities, later this year.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Does my right hon. Friend regard the comments of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) as supportive of his proposals, or will the Opposition face both ways again on crime prevention? Will my right hon. Friend cast his mind back to the time when I was practising in the magistrates courts? Magistrates then required sureties and recognisances from other people before a defendant was allowed bail, and if the defendant broke bail they were forfeited. Could my right hon. Friend extend that practice to those who break bail and deal with the problem in that way?

Mr. Baker: I note what my hon. Friend has said. I have said that the Judicial Studies Board will review the training of magistrates and the Bail Act 1976. Such points will be covered by the review.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does the Home Secretary accept that it is somewhat unrealistic to talk of remand in custody for people who commit further offences on bail when we have a massive shortage of accommodation and policies such as "Operation Container" and the problems associated with that? Do we not need to do more to ensure that those who are remanded in custody are brought to trial much more quickly than they are at present, because they are innocent until proved guilty in court?

Mr. Baker: Yes. I have considerable sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman says. I am worried about court delays. A working group was set up by the Attorney-General, the Lord Chancellor and myself to find ways of streamlining pre-trial procedures. The working group, which reported just before Christmas, recommended 200 or so changes in procedure. Some are fairly small, but cumulatively they will have a significant effect on court delays. They are being implemented now. I have in mind target time limits. Targets have been established by the Crown prosecution service for the various processes of a case.

Tomorrow the Lord Chancellor and I will publish a report on a White Paper which reviews the future management of magistrates court services. Pre-trial reviews are taking place on an experimental basis in selected magistrates courts. The introduction of remand for 28 days should reduce unnecessary court hearings and encourage effective case management.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, to the law-abiding public, it flies in the face of all reason that someone who commits an offence while on bail does not receive a severe penalty? Given the facts that he has put to us today on the disturbing number of extra people who commit offences, will my right hon. Friend say roughly what percentage of those people did not incur another penalty?

Mr. Baker: It is difficult to give my hon. Friend the exact figure that he requires. But I agree entirely about people who are given bail and commit an offence. There is plenty of evidence from the police forces to show that that happens. We have had evidence from Northumbria police force and Avon and Somerset police force. The police become frustrated when they arrest someone, bring him to court—I say "he" because it is usually a young male—and find that he is released on bail.

The proposal that I have announced today will, first, improve the flow of information so that a bad risk can be more precisely identified. Secondly, there will be changes in the law so that people who offend on bail know that they could be subject to a longer sentence than would otherwise be the case. I believe that in many cases that will act as a deterrent to offending on bail. I am glad to say that the package that I have announced today has been widely discussed with the police and has their strongest support.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens South): Does the Home Secretary agree that if someone who is arrested, charged with an offence and granted bail commits an offence while on bail, the magistrates have the power to remand that person in custody? Perhaps they ought to be reminded that they have that power. But the other point, which is more important, is that when an offender comes to be sentenced by the court it will sentence for count 1, the first offence, and then for count 2, which happens to be consecutive and is therefore added on. The thrust behind all this is gently to remind the judiciary that it has the power to make consecutive sentences. We do not need any more legislation because the judges are capable of taking care of the situation anyway.

Mr. Baker: I noticed that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) was nodding when the hon. Gentleman said that we did not need the measure. I assure him that we do. Again I have been pressed by the chief constables to bring in a change in the law about the aggravating offence. I believe that it will have an effect on the attitude of young men who are likely to reoffend on bail. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman thinks that the present arrangements are satisfactory. He is in a small minority if he does.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): May I reassure my right hon. Friend that my constituents in Elworth in Sandbach will be reassured by the proposals that he has announced today? Can he tell us within what time scale they will be implemented? Will he say a little more about bail hostels? One is to be opened in Sandbach later this year. A vital matter to local residents is that the selection of those who are to stay in the hostel should ensure that they are the least likely to reoffend. Another is that the hostels should be run rigorously. That will reassure local people about the safety of themselves, their properties and their cars.

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend raises an important point. I receive a fair amount of correspondence from both Conservative and Opposition Members about the location of bail hostels. They must be run properly and, indeed, effectively and strongly. That is what my hon. Friend was saying, and I accept it. She asked about the timing of the measures. The four measures that do not require legislation are already in hand. The two measures that require legislation will be introduced immediately after the election and we shall give them high priority. As I understand it, the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, by nodding in approval of what his hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) said a moment ago, showed that he does not support one of the measures. So presumably the Labour party will not put that measure in its manifesto.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Is the Home Secretary aware that what we needed today was not a statement but a confession as to why, after all the Government's massive spending on the police, courts and prisons, crime has doubled during the lifetime of the Government? People outside this place are not conned into thinking that the talk of toughening laws and filling up the prisons two weeks before an election will deal with the conditions that breed crime. What we need is a majority Labour Government with, at the very least, a programme of full employment.

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman is trying to find every reason and excuse for crime other than the individual responsibility of the criminal. I do not agree. He says that we are producing tough measures at the end of this Parliament. We have introduced tougher penalties during our years in office and the Labour party has voted against them. When we introduced the Criminal Justice Bill in 1991 the Labour party voted against the proposals. [HON. MEMBERS: "No, we did not."] Yes, the Labour party voted against proposals to take into account the record of convicted prisoners. It is on the record. It also put forward proposals to reduce the length of time served by serious criminals in prison. We shall put all that before the country during the next few weeks.

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to compliment Avon and Somerset police, who were one of the first to identify the problem and the scale of the problem in Bristol and surrounding areas? Does he have any idea of where resources are likely to be allocated? If not, could some of those resources be directed towards Bristol, in Avon and Somerset?

Mr. Baker: I have heard what my hon. Friend has said about further resources in Bristol and I shall bear his request in mind when it comes to the bail information schemes. I pay tribute to the Avon and Somerset police. I met with them at the end of last week. They have done a great deal of work on reoffending while on bail, and the research which they produced has helped us considerably in formulating the package.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Does the Home Secretary accept that his proposals mean that more people will be sent to prison and that many of Britain's prisons are a disgrace? Will he accept from someone who visited Brixton a few weeks ago that the number of mentally ill people in prison is unacceptable? Does he accept the view that Dr. Andrew Coyle—a distinguished governor, who is served by excellent staff in Brixton—said on the BBC documentary about what is going on there that those people should not be there? In a civilised society, what proposals does the Home Secretary have to deal with those important matters?

Mr. Baker: I agree that Dr. Coyle is a distinguished prison governor. The programme of refurbishment at Brixton is one of our largest refurbishment programmes and will extend to the hospital wing.

We do not expect a significant increase in the prison population as a result of the proposals. There will be a more accurate identification of those people who present a risk of reoffending while on bail. As a result of the better information services which will be available to the courts it may be possible to release some of the people remanded in custody, where the risk is much less, possibly to a bail hostel, or to tighter supervision within the community.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): Will my right hon. Friend elaborate on the answer that he gave to the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) and explain how the Government have improved the flow of court cases, is planning to improve it further and therefore will diminish the number of people who fall into that category?

Mr. Baker: I refer my hon. Friend to the written answer given by the Attorney-General before Christmas. A working party, involving officials from the Home Department, the Crown prosecution service and the Lord Chancellor's Department, has been established to find ways to speed court processes. As I have said, most of the changes are modest but cumulatively they make a great difference. For example, the Crown prosecution service can now state time limits on the progress of a case through the courts. That great improvement is now being implemented.

I attach great importance to this package of measures. They are not dramatic or headline stuff, but they represent good court administration. If we can speed up the court process and cut court delays, justice and efficiency will be served.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Does the Home Secretary accept that there has been an almighty row between the Lord Chancellor's Department and legal aid lawyers about the cost of representing people in cases of this sort? Will the Lord Chancellor take note of the extra work involved if there is a more thorough examination of people's antecedents before bail is granted? Will the Home Secretary tell us what will happen to a person who has been sentenced and convicted for a first offence after a second offence, which aggravates the first, is committed? How will the courts deal with that?

Mr. Baker: The person will be sentenced only after the second offence. That question would be more properly directed to my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor because it refers to legal aid and green form aid. I hope that the solicitors representing defendants in such cases—it is important to recognise that they are defendants because they are not guilty until convicted—will benefit enormously from the improved flow of information. The solicitors may not incur extra costs, and they may welcome some of the cost savings that result.

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): With regard to juvenile offenders, the courts often find that they are not given reports by social services and, therefore, they cannot provide secure accommodation. In such cases, cannot the courts decide, at their own discretion, whether the juvenile offender should be remanded?

Mr. Baker: Money has been secured for building more accommodation for juveniles. I attach priority to that. That responsibility is shared with the Department of Health. I want those proposals, which are shortly to be announced, to go ahead as quickly as possible.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Is it not simpler and more constructive for the Government to create an economic climate in which jobs are available for the majority of the young men we have been discussing this afternoon?

Mr. Baker: When it comes to the causes of crime, it serves no purpose to blame anyone but the criminal. Criminals have individual responsibility. That point is important. We have taken initiatives which deal with the problem of young offenders in order to divert them from a life of crime. It is important that we do that and there are positive ideas in the proposals that I have announced this afternoon to achieve that.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): My right hon. Friend's package of measures will be warmly welcomed by the victims of crime and the police who find it difficult to recapture them as fast as the courts release them on bail. I urge my right hon. Friend to go further and remove the courts' discretion to allow further bail to those who commit offences when they are already on bail. Will he make it mandatory for such people to be remanded in custody or in bail hostels?

Mr. Baker: I do not wish to limit the discretion of the courts in that way. Judges and magistrates will be provided with additional powers to consider aggravated consequences. I do not wish to oblige them mandatorily to assign reoffenders on bail to custody automatically. Perhaps the best arrangement would be to send such offenders to bail hostels, or to put them under tighter supervision through curfew orders, or to require them to attend police stations. However, it depends on the offender, and the court should continue to have that discretion.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): The Government must accept some responsibility for creating the conditions in which crime can flourish. The right hon. Gentleman gloats about the increased amount of bail hostel accommodation. He must appreciate that the need for such accommodation was mentioned in the Woolf report. How can he claim that his policy has been successful when the number of people in detention continues to increase?

Mr. Baker: I am well aware of the problems of prisoners in police cells. That is one reason why I have decided to keep active in the prison estate six prisons that were scheduled to be closed, and why we have pressed ahead with our prison building programme. In the next 12 months, six new prisons will be opened, providing 4,500 new prison places. It represents the largest prison building programme this century.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): One part of my right hon. Friend's welcome statement will not need legislation, and that is the section dealing with magistrates courts. While not wishing to anticipate tomorrow's report, may I ask my right hon. Friend to persuade magistrates courts committees not to close smaller courts, as is being attempted in my constituency?

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend raises what is, for the most part, a contentious local matter. Reviews of the administration of magistrates courts are taking place all the time. My hon. Friend will recall that, as from 1 April, the Lord Chancellor will take responsibility for magistrates courts. I regard it as a sensible transfer that the Lord Chancellor's Department should be responsible for Crown and magistrates courts, and I know that he will address the problem of which my hon. Friend has spoken. Indeed, I shall draw my hon. Friend's comments to his attention.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that nothing in his statement will allay the fears of my constituents? Is he further aware that it is no good tinkering at the edges and that we must look at the underlying causes of the escalation of crime? Considering the various policies that the Government have introduced but which have failed, may I ask him to consider establishing a royal commission to examine the underlying causes and to make recommendations?

Mr. Baker: No, I do not believe that we need a royal commission. I have set up a royal commission to look into the criminal justice system because I am sure that it needs that type of attention, but I do not believe that a royal commission would contribute to this issue. We need positive action to deal with the problem of reoffending, and I have this afternoon produced a positive package which many of the hon. Gentleman's constituents, on reflection, will welcome.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Given that the incidence of offending while on bail is higher in places where delays and court adjournments are at their highest, would it not be more sensible to examine the distribution of stipendiary magistrates throughout the country? Is my

right hon. Friend aware that areas with the longest delays —such as Bristol, Teesside and Northumberland—do not have stipendiary magistrates?

Mr. Baker: I shall draw that proposal to the attention of the Lord Chancellor. The number of stipendiary magistrates has increased slightly since we came to power. An advantage of such a large prison building programme is that it has been possible in some cases to build courts alongside prisons. That has eased considerably the passage and process of justice. It has happened at Belmarsh, in London, for example. There is a tremendous movement every day from prisons to courts in respect of remand. That is why we have introduced the possibility of a 28-day remand. I believe that the Opposition oppose that, though it would be a sensible change. It would reduce the number of court appearances and would help to reduce court delays.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the Home Secretary pay tribute to the Gwent police force, which has been highly efficient and has one of the highest clear-up rates in Britain? Will he show his appreciation by for once allowing that police force to have the number of constables it needs? Year after year the right hon. Gentleman denies the police authority and the chief constable the number of policemen the force requires. Is it not a fact that the Home Secretary stands at the Dispatch Box judged guilty as charged of 13 years of incompetence, of rising crime and of anarchy on the streets, and that his sentence should include political exile for a long time?

Mr. Baker: If the hon. Gentleman intends to try to persuade the electorate that the Labour party has effective policies on law and order, he will be pushing a stone uphill. In the latest Gallup poll, the Conservatives had a 22 point lead over Labour on the issue of law and order. That is not surprising because when Labour Members were in office they cut the amount of money available to the police, to the courts, and to the prisons.

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): In welcoming my right hon. Friend's statement, may I remind him that half of all crimes in south Wales are car related and that approximately half those crimes are committed by a small number of young offenders, usually awaiting sentence for a first offence? Most appropriately, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has made proposals for secure accommodation, which would be the best way to contain those offenders and stop them reoffending. Amazingly, however, Labour-controlled South Glamorgan council is trying to thwart that proposal. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that he will brook no such opposition, thereby demonstrating that the Government are on the side of the victim, not of the criminal?

Mr. Baker: What my hon. Friend says about South Glamorgan council is true and it does not surprise me. Too much attention is paid to the criminal and not enough is paid to the victim, which is why we now have the most generous system of criminal compensation in the western world, why we published the victims' charter some 18 months ago—and it is being implemented—and why we have a network of 7,500 volunteers to help victims. None of that would have happened had the Labour party been in office for the past few years.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Does the Home Secretary agree that the guilty should be punished? Is he aware that in Greater Manchester now, two years after the Strangeways incident, more than 600 prisoners are being held in police cells, either convicted or on remand? On many weekends, because those people are being held in police cells, the police find it difficult to place prisoners anywhere within Greater Manchester, so the pressure on the police to give police bail is extremely high. As the Home Secretary is directly responsible for that appalling situation and is hamstringing the police in Greater Manchester, is not it time that he resigned?

Mr. Baker: I have given considerable support to the police in Manchester. Indeed, the increase in standard spending assessments for police forces across the country this coming year is between 15 per cent. and 17 per cent., which shows our commitment to police forces. It allows all police forces to recruit up to establishment, which they could not do when the Labour Government were in office because they left the police forces 8,000 under establishment.

I am aware of the problems in the Manchester area. The consequences of Strangeways still exist, but a substantial investment programme is going ahead in prisons in the north-west, and I hope that that problem will be contained in the coming months.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Each of the six measures that my right hon. Friend proposed is to be welcomed. Hopefully, this time the Labour party will support them. May I suggest a seventh measure? My right hon. Friend will remember that during the Committee stage of the Criminal Justice Bill in 1988 I proposed a new clause that provided that, for a serious indictable offence, a court would have to explain why it had given bail against police advice. Although the Home Office decided to accept the principle, it would not go as far as I wanted and implemented the measure only for murder, attempted murder, manslaughter, rape and attempted rape. Is not it about time that, for all serious indictable offences, the courts gave their reasons publicly for granting bail against police advice?

Mr. Baker: If a court decides to give bail against police advice, it owes it to the police to explain the reasons. It is statutorily required to do so, as my hon. Friend accurately described, in serious cases—in cases of murder, manslaughter, attempted murder, rape or attempted rape. We are continuing our discussions with the police and the other agencies, including the magistracy, in the coming months, and I shall bear in mind my hon. Friend's suggestion. If a magistrate decides to give bail after considerable pressure from the police, it is fair to suggest that the reasons should be stated. With the growing co-operation between the agencies—the Crown prosecution service, the magistracy and the police—that is the sort of spirit that we are trying to generate.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Does the Home Secretary understand my surprise and disappointment that in his presentation he did not give credit to Northumbria police and the research carried out in Newcastle university which has played such an important part in highlighting the problem? Does that mean that he also intends to leave Newcastle and Northumbria out of his proposals on bail information and

[Mr. Jim Cousins]

extra bail hostels? Does he recognise that, throughout the recent difficult period, Newcastle police have been attending to many overflow prisoners in police cells, so they are less able to deal with good order on the streets as they are coping with bad order in prisons? Will he ensure that juvenile secure accommodation is made available to the Newcastle and Northumbria police and that they do not have to travel 20 to 25 miles to find it?

Mr. Baker: On the issue of juvenile secure accommodation, I refer the hon. Gentleman to what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson).

I pay tribute to the work done by Northumbria police. They prepared their figures on a different statistical basis from that used by other forces and the Home Office, but they identified many incidents of reoffending on bail, particularly in north Tyneside. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would like to be reminded of the fact that, this year, the Northumbrian police have benefited from the urban crime fund—an extra £3·6 million was made available to the Northumbrian police. There was also a substantial increase in standard spending assessment of 16 per cent. for that police force, and a substantial payment was made as a result of the riot damage last September.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Will my hon. Friend continue to give the measures urgent attention, particularly in relation to juvenile offenders? It is simply unacceptable for 16-year-olds to appear in court and plead guilty to as many as 20 offences, most of which were committed on bail after the offender had been arrested. One such offence involved killing a woman in Filey in an accident that involved a stolen vehicle. The young person had been released by Scarborough magistrates court only four days previously as there was no secure accommodation to which to send him. The public expect the Government to do something. The utterly disgraceful response of the Labour party shows that it is incapable of doing anything about the problem.

Mr. Baker: Of course, we are committed to increasing secure accommodation. The cumulative effect of the measures that I have announced this afternoon will help considerably in identifying the young men who pose a bad risk and are liable to reoffend on bail. Positive action must be taken to ensure that reoffending is curbed.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Why has crime doubled under this Government?

Mr. Baker: I have answered various questions during the past few days on that subject. Since the war, the level of crime in Britain has increased regularly by about 5 per cent. a year. The increased spate of crime in the past 18 months is largely due to the rapid increase in car crime, which represents 30 per cent. of all crime. Many of the reoffenders of whom we are talking today are engaged in car crime. I hope that the measures that I have introduced today will have some impact on the level of car crime.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): In connection with this welcome statement and the serious level of shocking crime committed by offenders on bail in Norwich, will my right hon. Friend pay tribute to the work of the crime prevention panel in Norwich? Together with the police, that organisation has been calling for such measures for some considerable time. Will my right hon. Friend address the issue of secure accommodation for young offenders in Norfolk and Suffolk, which also poses a serious problem?

Mr. Baker: I re-emphasise what I have said about secure accommodation. I met the crime prevention panel in Norwich when I visited the constabulary there, and know that it does valuable work. It does particularly important work in relation to protecting vulnerable women as they go around the city centre—an effective example of a crime prevention panel co-operating with the police.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Is the Home Secretary aware that the men and women of this country desperately want the ability to live in peace and security in their own homes without fear of burglary, having their car stolen or smashed open and having the radio taken? Would those same men and women share with me, and police men and women up and down the country, a sense of cynicism that, today, the Home Secretary, like a latter-day Rip Van Winkle, has suddenly been woken up by the news that the Conservatives are likely to lose the next election, and so is now about to introduce a measure to do something about the crime wave in our country?

Opposition Members have always supported positive measures to combat crime, and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has said, we support most of the measures announced by the Home Secretary. We ask the Government, however, why they do not go further. Why did they not grasp the nettle and tackle the causes of crime years ago? There have been 13 wasted years. Why did the Government not act?

Mr. Baker: I am delighted to accept converts. Over the past year, the hon. Gentleman has not supported measures—tough measures—that we have introduced. He voted against the joyriding Bill——

Mr. Sheerman: I did not.

Mr. Baker: Oh yes, he did. He voted against the Committee stage——

Mr. Sheerman: That is a lie.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Sheerman: The Home Secretary is a liar.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but we cannot have that. The hon. Gentleman must withdraw it.

Mr. Sheerman: What does an hon. Member do, Mr. Speaker, when he has been slandered in the House? I did not not vote against that Bill, as the Home Secretary has alleged quite falsely. No Opposition Member voted against it. The Home Secretary has lied to the House. What am I supposed to do?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is compounding the problem. He must not ascribe—[HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."]

Mr. Sheerman: I will withdraw what I said, but, as someone who has been slandered by the Home Secretary, I ask for your protection, Mr. Speaker.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) has made his position clear. Now let us hear the Home Secretary.

Mr. Baker: I wanted to say—*[Interruption.]* May I just say exactly what happened with the joyriding Bill? In crucial votes during the Committee stage, Opposition Members voted against the principle of the Bill——

Mr. Sheerman: Weasel!

Mr. Baker: They were weasel words. In Committee, the Opposition voted against the principle of a Bill that extended culpability to all the passengers in a car. They voted against that, and they voted against the burden of proof. That is what they voted against. They have also voted against other measures. If the House wants an example of how soft they are on crime, let me point out that they voted against renewal of the prevention of terrorism Act last night.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am genuinely sorry that I have not been able to call all the hon. Members who wished to speak, but I shall certainly bear them in mind if and when we return to this subject.

Points of Order

4.22 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you received a request from any Minister to make a statement about the arrest of two British nationals in Switzerland for alleged Iranian-related crime? Apparently, it is the subject of a D-notice.

Mr. Speaker: I have not heard of that, and I have received no request for a statement.

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Has the Secretary of State for Wales said that he will come to the House to make a statement about the virtual collapse of the public transport system in my constituency? One of the major companies has gone into receivership. As a result, ordinary people in my constituency cannot go about their business, because they cannot catch a bus.

Mr. Speaker: I have had no request for a statement. I think that it would be appropriate for the matter to be raised in an Adjournment debate.

BILL PRESENTED

Young Persons' Rights

Mr. Terry Fields, supported by Mr. Dave Nellist, Mr. Tony Benn, Mr. Eddie Loyden, Mr. Robert Parry, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Max Madden, Mr. Jimmy Wray and Mr. Ronnie Campbell, presented a Bill to amend the law relating to the conditions regulating Government training schemes; to make further provision from the National Insurance Fund wth respect to social security benefits for young persons; to make further provision with respect to income support and housing benefit; and for purposes connected therewith: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 28 February, and to be printed. [Bill 87.]

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put together the Questions on the three motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Representation of the People

That the draft Representation of the People (Variation of Limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) Order 1992 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Urban Development

That the Birmingham Heartlands Development Corporation (Area and Constitution) Order 1992 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Social Security

That the draft Social Security (Contributions) Amendment (No. 4) Regulations 1992 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Question agreed to.

Offences Against the Person (Amendment)

4.23 pm

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Offences against the Person Act 1861 to provide for increased penalties for assaults upon members of the emergency services on duty; and for connected purposes.

The police are responsible for protecting us from disruptive and unlawful elements in our society. The Metropolitan police and the Surrey constabulary, which cover my constituency, do a wonderful job; so do the ambulance men and firemen who serve my county.

Every day throughout the country the emergency services display devotion to duty under pressure. The police are coping with five times as many crimes as there were 30 years ago, yet we have to ask whether the members of the emergency services are getting the protection that we, as citizens, expect.

We have all heard of and been appalled by the stories during last autumn's riots of attacks on members of the emergency services who were trying to protect citizens. We know from Police Federation reports and others of policemen and policewomen who have been assaulted while investigating an incident or trying to keep the peace. Let us not ponder on the sick mentality of those who carry out such attacks. Let us start by ensuring that the punishment fits the crime. These attacks are nasty, brutish and despicable, regardless of the extent of the injuries caused.

My Bill does not focus on the tragic murders or the sickening cases of grievous bodily harm which have recently been reported. Here the full force of the law is unleashed. What is often not noticed is that members of the emergency services are increasingly faced with routine violence which can inflict injuries on them while they are carrying out their duties. The courts do not seem to be imposing stiff sentences on offenders. In recognition of that fact, my Bill is specifically concerned with assault and threatening behaviour which impedes an officer from carrying out his or her duty to protect the public.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) has raised these matters many times in the House. I pay tribute to him. Alan Eastwood, the chairman of the Police Federation, disclosed last year that close to 20,000 police officers were attacked, a figure which he claimed represents one in four of the force's operational strength. In Surrey, between January and December 1991, 238 officers were assaulted. In London, 3,725 attacks were recorded against police officers in the 12 months to October 1991.

The Government have reacted to the concern expressed by colleagues. I look forward to the publication of the Home Office's survey of statistical evidence of attacks and consequent sentencing. I hope that it will soon be available. It appears that not only is the number of incidents rising but the attacks are becoming more vicious. In Surrey alone, in the six months to October of last year, 18 officers were placed sick as a result of the assaults made on them, causing in total 211 days lost through attack-related sickness. The police also tell me that attacks on women police officers are increasingly sadistic.

The police rightly expect that the perpetrators of assaults should be severely punished. Unfortunately, that is not happening. In Surrey, between November 1990 and October 1991, 140 incidents, involving 142 offenders, were concluded. Out of that number, only 11 offenders received a custodial sentence. More specifically, the deputy chief constable of Surrey tells me that on one morning last December, magistrates in Chertsey imposed the following penalties: holding a car boot sale in contravention of a planning notice, a fine of £1,400; no car insurance, a fine of £200; fishing in the Thames without a licence, a fine of £60; assault on a police officer, occasioning actual bodily harm, a fine of £50. Last year a Surrey police officer went before the Crown court to give evidence about the attack upon him by two men. The policeman had sustained a quite serious back injury and broken bones in his arm, and he was still having physiotherapy treatment nine months later. The thugs who administered that beating received only community service orders of between 180 and 200 hours respectively.

A sentencing policy of that nature is, frankly, laughable and displays no sense of proportion. What is even more demoralising from the point of view of the police is when a section 47 offence under the Offences against the Person Act 1861, which might carry up to two or three years' imprisonment, is reduced to common assault, with a maximum of six months, or is dropped altogether, or only a warning is given. It is no wonder that the police are furious. That can only encourage the have-a-go mentality of idiots who will take a swing at the police because they know that they will get away with it.

The police are at the sharp end of tackling crime. As citizens, we can assist with communitywide involvement in neighbourhood watches or can become special constables, but, essentially, individual officers have to take the impact of increasing violence with little physical protection. They expect our support. They should take a dim view of how they would be protected by the Labour party's threats to extend political control over police and crime prevention, knowing how some socialists always have a soft spot for criminals and how the Labour party has voted against or tried to weaken every major piece of legislation that the Government have introduced to increase sentences.

I am not surprised that many police officers are buying their own body armour or considering American-style batons. Such batons could be a useful adjunct and should be part of the equipment of every police force in the country. However, they may be better for restraining than for straightforward defence.

We have to increase the penalties available in law and to encourage magistrates to impose them. I hope that magistrates pay attention to the criticism that is targeted on their sentencing policy by many hon. Members.

The criminal must be seen to pay for the assault. The police are not fair game, ready for a punch-up by any gang that feels that they can get away with it. An assault on a police officer should lead to immediate custody, even if the injury is relatively minor. The penalty should range up to a gaol sentence of two years, with or without hard labour —the phrase that appears in the original 1861 Act.

Other members of the emergency services are also vulnerable, as recent events have shown. Only yesterday, youths were reported to have thrown stones at firefighters who were trying to extinguish a blaze on a housing estate. Sadly, that was not an isolated incident. Stone throwers have made emergency calls to lure firemen into ambushes. Do those louts consider what would happen if the emergency services were stopped from attending a genuine

fire or the consequences for anyone trapped in the fire? Those are not minor incidents; it is a very worrying state of affairs.

In protecting our emergency services, particularly the police, we are protecting not only the individuals who wear uniforms but society. Police officers, firemen and ambulance men and women come to the aid of individuals. If they are deflected from their duty by mindless violence, we, as citizens, suffer.

Assaults on any citizen are serious. Assaults on the emergency services when they are trying to protect citizens are unforgivable and brutish. They must be stopped by the full imposition of the powers of law and I hope that my Bill will go some way towards toughening those provisions and that magistrates will then apply them.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Ian Taylor, Mrs. Maureen Hicks, Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock, Mr. John Bowis, Mr. Simon Burns, Mr. Dudley Fishburn, Mr. Christopher Gill, Mr. Robert Hayward, Mr. Michael Irvine, Mr. Tim Janman, Mr. Roger King and Mr. Graham Riddick.

Offences Against the Person (Amendment)

Mr. Ian Taylor accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 to provide for increased penalties for assaults upon members of the emergency services on duty, and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 13 March and to be printed. [Bill 88.].

Orders of the Day

Local Government Bill *[Lords]*

[Allotted Day]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

4.35 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise for raising this issue, but as a member of the Committee which discussed the Bill I seek your guidance. I notice from the amendments and new clauses to be discussed under the guillotine motion that the first part of the Bill will be given no consideration until we debate new clause 20. What was the procedure which ensured that there will be no debate on the first part of the Bill? It is vitally important that we have a debate on issues that were not properly dealt with in Committee. To judge from the selection of amendments, it seems highly unlikely that there will be any consideration of the major first part of the Bill. It is highly unacceptable to Back Benchers that an important part of the Bill is not to be debated on Report.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member knows that new clauses and amendments are dealt with in the order in which they appear on the selection list. It is true that we shall not deal with the first part of the Bill until we debate new clause 20. If the hon. Member is suggesting that I was unable to select new clause 5, I am afraid that that is right because it was outside the scope of the Bill.

New clause 3

Duties of Local Government Commission

'.—(1) The Local Government Commission established under section 12(1) below shall have regard to the need—

(a) to reflect the identities and interests of local communities;

(b) to secure effective and convenient unitary local government;

(c) to establish a structure which is comprehensible to electors;

(d) to promote accountable local government;

(e) to secure the most effective, efficient and economic use of local authorities' financial resources;

(f) to ensure the cost-effective exercise of local authority functions and delivery of local authority services; and

(g) to provide for the consideration of appropriate strategic issues at a regional level.'.—*[Mr. Blunkett.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this we may consider the following:

New clause 13—*Environmental protection*—

'. The Local Government Commission shall, in making recommendations under this Part, have particular regard to the need to secure effective planning for environmental purposes.'.

New clause 14—*Local Government Commission: Objectives*—

'The Local Government Commission shall be required to frame all its recommendations to the Secretary of State so as to take account of the following objectives:

[Mr. Speaker]

(a) to identify areas within which people expect to obtain most of their everyday services;
(b) to establish local government boundaries that facilitate the meeting of people's needs and the respecting of existing social organisation;
(c) to enhance the representative role of local government and secure its long-term future; and
(d) to ensure that all issues relating to the effective and efficient delivery of services can be addressed independently of defining local government territories.'.

New clause 17—*Arrangements for direct service delivery for new unitary authorities*—

'.—(1) The Secretary of State may by order give power to the Audit Commission to—
(a) consider the implications for functions of all changes proposed by the Local Government Commission under section 13(5) and section 14(5) and;
(b) make proposals to the Secretary of State on a function by function basis for separate or combined (either jointly or by one or more councils on behalf of other councils) service delivery arrangements for those functions included in subsection (1)(a) above and for the territories in which such services are to be provided.

(2) An order under subsection (1) above may give directions as to the exercise by the Audit Commission of any powers under this section and such directions may require that Commission to have regard to any guidance given by the Secretary of State as respects matters to be taken into account.'.

Mr. Blunkett: It is unfortunate that we are debating the Bill in this way. Effectively, we are debating only part II on a guillotine motion on Report and Third Reading, as my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) said. We debated part II on the final day of the Committee proceedings on a guillotine motion, taking from 10.30 pm until midnight to deal with the issue of reorganisation. In one sense, we have reversed that process this afternoon because, despite the fact that the Committee's report to the House states that only one set of changes was made, in Government amendments to clause 8, it seems that we shall not be debating and scrutinising on Report that matter which was amended by the Government in Committee.

It must therefore be put on record that the way in which the guillotine has been ordered and has fallen is less than helpful in terms of the proper scrutiny and debate of a major piece of legislation. Clearly, there is no point in pursuing the issue of selection at this stage, but it is important to put it on record that we are deeply opposed to the amendments made to clause 8 in Committee and that we shall continue to oppose those impositions.

I regret that we are not dealing with this major issue —the reorganisation of local government in England— with unanimity and consensus. For agreement, certainty and stability to have been reached would have been a logical conclusion to the shambles consequent on previous reorganisations. For the lessons of 1972 not to be learnt in 1992 shows a deliberate and presumably intentional refusal to learn the lessons of history. If the Government have the opportunity of implementing their proposals, the nation will live to regret it.

We could have reached a consensus about the nature of the reorganisation, and we could have had a degree of unanimity about its objectives, but we have not done so because the Government have chosen to continue on an ideological path that they commenced some 13 years ago. Local government was seen as an obstacle to the economic and social reconstruction of Britain and was believed to be a block on the reorientation of our democratic structures so that the operation of the market place rather than the ballot box would be supreme. The Government substituted their market square for our family circle. Everything was subjected to the law of Mammon. The intention was to determine whether something was profitable and whether it could be put out to tender. The key values of centralisation and privatisation were placed above those of accountability and democratisation.

Under new clause 3, we raise today the whole question of what local government is supposed to be about. What is the reorganisation intended to achieve? Is it driven by a desire to ensure that local people have a say over their lives in a pluralistic democracy in which they can choose for themselves the nature of the provision, the extent of the services delivered, and the quality that they wish to see, and in which they have the ability to raise and spend money to achieve those objectives? Alternatively, is the Bill about reorganising local government in the image of its makers in Westminster and Whitehall—namely, the majority party in the House? It is clear to us that the answer to the latter question is yes. The reorganisation is about the Government's ideological determination to ensure that local authorities are no more than a mouthpiece for a handful of people who manage to find civic office. It is not concerned with local government as a means of community expression and a part of government rather than merely local administration.

It is important to raise a number of key questions today about the nature of local government and what we seek to obtain in reorganising its structure and functions. It is clear to us that local government should be just that—it should be local and it should be government. The Bill and the propositions for the operation of the local government commission will achieve the exact opposite. They take away the ability of local people to act loyally, and they order government only in the sense that it is centralised in the hands of Ministers and civil servants in Westminster and Whitehall. Such government is not local because local people will not be able to determine the way in which local government operates its services. The whole design and structure of the propositions are predicated on the belief that local services will be put out to tender, and will be privatised or centralised.

The appendix to the guidance for the commission shows clearly how major services, which we expect to be dealt with by local government, are to be taken substantially away from the determination of locally elected representatives. The guidance is explicit, so it is worth repeating—as we did briefly in Committee—the way in which it is phrased.

Housing is currently a key function for district authorities outside the metropolitan areas. The Government's decision is clear because the guidance talks about the way in which the housing function should continue. It says:

"Authorities also own and manage some four million units of housing but Government policy is that they should adopt an enabling role, assessing needs in their area but relying on housing associations and the private sector for new provision."

In other words, the function of a local authority in providing directly for the needs of its electorate will be

removed. The ability of a local authority to respond directly to the aspirations and the desperate needs of people will be diminished. Instead, the role of local authorities will be merely to monitor and to appeal to other people to provide for the desperate needs not only of the homeless but of the many people who seek rehousing at different times in their lives. They may need more suitable accommodation, such as sheltered provision in old age. They may need more appropriate dwellings as their families grow up or as their families are extended.

It is clear, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) will confirm, that the intention behind the Government's housing policy is to ensure that people no longer turn to their elected representatives to have their needs met. They will be expected to turn to the private sector and to housing associations alone. None of us says that a pluralistic approach cannot be applied to those issues.

4.45 pm

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in some instances the sheer size of local authority housing departments militates against good management? Does he acknowledge that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), a previous Front Bench spokesman on housing, said that Birmingham was trying to manage more than 100,000 properties which simply was not practical? Is it not right that we should now talk about local authorities being concerned more with enabling than with simply trying to manage bigger and bigger departments?

Mr. Blunkett: The Bill deals with authorities outside the metropolitan areas. No one could describe the housing authorities in the non-metropolitan districts as gigantic. It is interesting to reflect that a recent report has shown that there is now grave concern about the size of housing associations, and about the way in which their operations can be more centralised and more at arm's length than those of local authorities. Local authorities have sought to decentralise their management and their facilities. Birmingham tried to parish the city, but was blocked in that endeavour. It attempted to ensure that there was devolved and decentralised management, which many good local authorities have sought to achieve.

Many of us feel that direct involvement by tenants in the running and operation of housing and housing estates is a valuable contribution in ensuring that they have genuine democratic control over what is rightly theirs. Placing tenants outside the local authority sector disables that process and makes it far more difficult. Recent studies have shown that there is far less tenant control in other sectors of housing than there is in the good authorities which have carried out Labour party policy in devolving and decentralising not only housing offices, but the management and control of their housing stock.

There are fundamental issues about the way in which facilities are taken away from the people for whom they are supposed to be intended. The same applies to education, in which the Government have also made their intentions clear. Much of the Bill is a hidden agenda. It is difficult for the Secretary of State for Education and Science to hide anything under a bushel, so the intentions for education have been made clear. We need to make them even clearer today. The guidance to the commission says:

> "The number of schools operating as grant-maintained . . . is likely to rise significantly".

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] "Hear, hear", comes heavily from Conservative Members.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Only two of them.

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend points out that it comes heavily from two Conservative Members.

The guidance continues:

> "grant-maintained status should become over time the natural organisational model for schools . . . It is also intended that the local authorities should lose their present responsibility for further education colleges and sixth-form colleges and for schools inspection."

The Further and Higher Education Bill is in Committee today, under a guillotine, for the dismemberment of the further and adult education service.

Authorities rightly look eagerly to the notion of unitary status and being able to bring together under one umbrella the provision of a number of key services so that they can integrate their social and economic policies for the locality as a whole. Unitary authorities would mean that people would have just one door to knock on. The authorities grasp in the air for the castles promised them, but find that they disintegrate into sand between their fingers because the functions that they would inherit bear no resemblance to local government as we have known it throughout the last century.

Instead of authorities having the power to act directly to house their people or to ensure education for children from nursery schooling to post-16 comprehensive education, just as the authorities feel that they have the opportunity to deal in a co-ordinated and integrated fashion with the needs of their people, suddenly they find that those functions are being taken from them. The illusion of new power and new responsibility is therefore turning into disillusionment. The people find that central Government are centralising and neutralising the powers that local authorities believed that they would have. The Government will determine funding arrangements from the centre and will relate directly to local schools or colleges through funding agencies rather than through the local education authority; Ministers will be responsible but not accountable for what happens locally.

Even in social services, we see the Government's intentions spelt out in the draft guidance to the commission. It says:

> "The Government's policy is that social services authorities should concentrate more on commissioning the procurement and assessment of services and less on direct provision themselves."

It recognises that child care has to be an exception, given the Children Act 1989, and the fact that the Minister of State at the Department of Health, the hon. Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley), has constantly referred to her commitment and to the need for local authorities to be able to act.

The logic of everything said, whether on housing, education, social services or the generality of provision, is that a local authority should no longer provide directly for its citizens but should become the enabling authority that the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) used to describe, which would meet only once a year to let private sector contracts. The No Turning Back

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group, of which the Minister of State remains an active supporter, spelt it out in its pamphlet, "Responsibility and Choice". It said:

> "Only public health, civil defence and local amenities need remain an integral part of local government."

What a choice—what a level of responsibility that is for local authorities to take on.

The Association of District Councils, eagerly awaiting the message that the commission is to set out on its travels to award councils new status, new power and new functions, finds in the end that they are to have none of them. Councils will end up with local government which is no more than a telephone box with a civic car outside. A mayor may be able to visit bazaars and give out largesse in the form of annual Christmas parcels or attend spring balls, without being able to meet the needs of the people in his community.

The legislation would make a farce of local democracy and a mockery of any attempt to devolve power to local government. Clearly, the Government have no intention of decentralising or devolving anything. They are intent on retaining power in their own hands, and on determining directly what local government should be able to raise and spend. The financial and functioning structure of local government will result in disillusionment and in people being increasingly frustrated. There is a danger of democracy being nothing more than a charade.

That is why we are against the way in which the commission is to operate. We do not agree with the Government's view of local government merely as an appendage to the central state rather than as a partner in a pluralistic democracy. We want to encourage people to partake in the delivery of local services and to stand for elected office so that they may take pride in the civic functions by contributing to the enhancement of the wellbeing of the people around them, and by being able to sustain and protect their environment. Instead, the financial system and the structure and functions proposed for local government would reduce it to a pale shadow of what we have understood it to be over the last 100 years.

The proposed operation of the commission reflects the Government's contempt for local democracy. The Government intend that local authorities should be dealt with piecemeal, one by one, with Labour-controlled counties being tackled first. The Government intend to carry out the structural changes in a way which leads to the abolition of Humberside, Cleveland, Avon, Derbyshire and Lancashire, simply because they happen to be Labour authorities.

The Government do not propose to act logically or to take a comprehensive look at England as a whole so as to ensure that the structure can be fitted together as a complete jigsaw. They mean to adopt a "hide and seek" version of making a jigsaw, where bits of the jigsaw emerge one at a time and people are expected to guess what the final picture will look like. That piecemeal approach will lead to blight. As local authorities are picked off one by one, they will lose their senior staff, who will seize the opportunity to move to other authorities. There will be a bonanza for the metropolitan and London areas which, in the key areas of education and social services, will be able to call on the expertise from the counties facing abolition before the district authorities, which are the aspirants to take over those functions, can organise themselves logically to offer posts or provide a guarantee of quality of service.

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): I understand that the hon. Gentleman disagrees with the Government about various activities of local government. If by some chance—or mischance, depending on one's point of view—he were to have responsibility for dealing with the legislation under a Labour Government, what would he do about the commission? There is a great deal of interest in that. The people want to know what would happen if Labour won. Would Labour go ahead with the legislation or repeal it? Would Labour change the commission or allow it to proceed so that the reform of local government, which most people accept is long overdue, may take place in a reasonable period of time?

Mr. Blunkett: In the one day available to us under the guillotine in Committee, we made the position clear. We made it clear that we were in favour of a comprehensive approach to the reorganisation of local government, and that we wished the commission to operate through panels dealing with different parts of the country, being able to take consensus and agreement where they were offered, and being able to report back where there were difficulties, so that within a rapid time scale—two years would be the preferred operational time scale—we could see a pattern of local government emerging across the country. The commission could report its findings, enabling local government to be reorganised in a sane and rational fashion, providing stability for existing services prior to the final report and providing a sensible and rational means for the transfer of services to the new designated authorities. Finally, it could offer the kind of guarantees for whose provision the 1972 reorganisation, with all its failings, served as a useful model.

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): Would that plan include the continuation of some two-tier authorities, or is what is being advocated a uniform single-tier system?

5 pm

Mr. Blunkett: It seems to us that there is little point in reorganising local government across the country if we end up with a shambles on our hands. Some counties will appeal to the Government to remain county councils, with their district councils continuing to act as they always have, while a neighbouring authority has unitary status having abolished its county and transferred what functions remain to the district. We illustrated that point in Committee: what is at issue is not whether one county should remain while others are removed, but the way in which authorities within a county would have to be dealt with if it was not clear that there should be a presumption of unitary status.

We do not have to have the same uniform status across the country. We are talking about numerical parity or saying that authorities must be of similar size. We are aware of the need for diversity and sensitivity. Some authorities have an identity of community even though they are small numerically or geographically difficult to operate. We recognise that such factors will have to be taken into account.

What we cannot countenance, however, is a shambles where one or two authorities claim unitary status within a county and the rest of the county has to be reorganised to

fit in with them. We cannot have a string of authorities across a major county—the example that we gave in Committee was Essex—claiming that they should have unitary status because of their identity of community, their sense of belonging and their urban nature, only to leave a rump of a county with a disgruntled population, which wanted not a third of the original county or half the original county but the whole county or unitary status. We shall be faced with a shambles whereby people claim that they want to retain the county but retain only part of it. The county will be a shadow of its previous self without its core identity, and in some cases with the prospect of being divided in two by unitary authorities which cut right across it.

Mr. French: Does the hon. Gentleman really believe that the local government commission would recommend unitary status for some authorities without paying any regard to what was left over?

Mr. Blunkett: The consultation paper and the proposal before us would allow just that. That is why I say that we must choose between unitary and two-tier authorities. Once one begins the process of providing unitary authorities within a county area, one will have to decide what is to happen to the rest of the county. There is a logic to it.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Paragraph 5.

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend reminds me that paragraph 5 of the consultation paper deals with the matter, although we do not need the consultation paper—only intelligent and rational thinking—to realise that when some authorities press for unitary status they will affect the status of other authorities with which they have a relationship within the county shire area.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The same is happening in education. For instance, competition between schools will mean that people will head for a school that is reputedly a good school with no thought for the one that they are leaving behind, which will become a sink school if the matter is left to the Conservatives.

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend has put his finger on it: "I'm all right, Jack, and the devil take the hindmost" is what the Government's policy is all about. Presumably they would say that, so long as some authorities get what they are after, everyone should be satisfied. We cannot have it both ways, however. We cannot have the existing county, with the existing county structure, if some districts within it become unitary authorities.

Mr. Channon: I think that that is a bad analogy. In Essex, and in a great many other counties, there are districts which were old county boroughs, for example. It would be perfectly possible for those old county boroughs to become unitary authorities in their own right without affecting the rest of the county at all—if that was what people in the county wanted.

Mr. Blunkett: It would affect the rest of the county which, at the moment, incorporates those former county boroughs. The minute one tries to reverse the arrangements and return to the county boroughs—and there is some dispute in some areas as to whether only the former county boroughs should claim unitary status—one affects the organisation of every key county service, which then has to cope with the change. One must change the operation of education—in so far as it remains part of local government—of the social services, of highways and of everything else. The minute one makes a decision in repect of one authority, there will be a chain reaction.

That is why we believe that there should be a comprehensive approach, rather than a piecemeal approach whereby some authorities are dealt with first and others gradually over what the Minister of State has described as a likely five-year time scale. We should view these matters as a whole. We should review the arrangements throughout the country and come up with comprehensive proposals. We should announce them in two years' time, allowing for a period of consultation during which representations could be made and during which we could sort out disagreements.

We could then move forward in a way which allows the existing authorities to transfer services in a stable and sensible way, maintaining the quality of those services while building up a new structure to enable those functions to be taken on. Unless we do that, we shall have a period of blight during which services in the existing authorities disintegrate and staff leave. The services will begin to fall apart before the new authorities have been established in a fashion that would allow those services and staff to transfer in an acceptable manner. That is why we shall be moving shortly on another matter—the staff commission —to which I shall come in a moment.

In new clause 3 we advocate a sensible, logical and well-thought-out approach. We have the option of finding a solution that will provide us with a lasting settlement for local government for generations to come or of accepting a piecemeal and fragmented approach which will result in dissatisfaction and continued calls for reorganisation and which will lead to our having to go through the whole process all over again in a few years' time. That would be very foolish indeed and most unfortunate for the populations of areas facing that shambles and that failure to provide quality. The outcome in terms of cost and quality would be most unsatisfactory. Moreover, it would reflect badly on the operations of the House and the way in which it has served local government badly over the past 13 years—another example of an ideological, value-driven approach rather than a logical approach taking into account the needs of local communities and responding intelligently to the demand for reorganisation.

We respect the demands for unitary authorities and for a return to the days when there was just one door on which to knock. We accept the need for accountability, which we applaud, to enable people to understand who is responsible for the services that they receive and who to hold to account for the results.

We want a reorganisation that would be lasting but, above all, a reorganisation that would be able to respond to the changing needs and aspirations of the population towards the year 2000. Instead, we face a proposition which would take away services rather than provide them, which would denude local government rather than complement those services that it already carries out, which would remove functions rather than build on them and restore them, which would give a piecemeal structure rather than a coherence that people could understand and respond to, and which would result in local government becoming even more the poodle of Westminster and Whitehall than a living part of our democracy enabling people to express themselves clearly and to have an

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alternative point of view to respond to the different political, economic and social needs of a diverse country and, above all, to be able to provide for the community that they serve the kind of services that that community wants rather than what central Government wants.

It happens that the rest of Europe has moved in the direction that we are advocating—that is, devolving and decentralising, giving people power to decide for themselves, providing quality services by encouraging and enabling local authorities to act on behalf of their communities, and ensuring that people have genuine choice. There should be choice as to who should provide services, choice as to whether services should be in-house or privatised, and choice as to what kind of spending and on what local authorities should spend their money. Those are the choices—about ownership, responsibility and accountability—that people have had for the past century in respect of their education services, their social services, their housing, their local refuse collection and their local environment. Now we see a threat to take it away—the threat of a commission which, from its very inception, will be disabled by a Bill and by guidance which take away those powers and denude local government of those services.

That is why we are opposed to the way in which the Government are operating under clause 2. That is why we are vehemently opposed to clause 1 and to the way in which the Government, particularly in clauses 8 and 9, are ensuring that reorganisation is complemented by privatisation and centralisation. That is why we believe that the Bill is flawed. An opportunity that has been missed and an agenda that could have carried us forward together have been set aside and replaced by dogma—by the values that were set out by the previous Prime Minister—and with a not-so-hidden agenda that carries those values and principles forward into the 1990s.

We know that the present Bill will not be carried into fruition. We know that we shall have the opportunity to change the guidance to the commission and to change its operation, and to ensure that it can do the job as we have described—a welcoming of partnership in local government to ensure that people receive the services that they want and deserve. That is why we know that, in rejecting the Bill and putting forward the new clause, we shall be responsible for carrying through our propositions and not the ones that the Government have put before us.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful for the chance to speak in support of the new clause moved by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) and the other new clauses that Mr. Speaker has selected. I shall be relatively brief and put one or two points that deserve to be put at this stage. I am grateful for the opportunity to be able to do so, as I was not a member of the Committee.

On new clause 3, my hon. Friends and I believe that it is right that we should seek consensus on the structure for deciding the future of local government, and the more that that can be based on the views of the people, the better. One of the faults of the previous local government review was the artificial creation of structures of local government which did not do justice to the collective sense of belonging in very disparate parts of the country. As we travel around the country, we realise the strength of people's commitment to certain areas and structures of government such as counties.

The right hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) referred to county boroughs. It is about time that we went back to a structure that reflected that view. I agree with the purport of the right hon. Gentleman's intervention, and I disagree with the hon. Member for Brightside. It is quite wrong, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) said, to prescribe that there can only ever be one form of local government. That would be to make the same mistakes as were made before.

I cannot see why it is not possible for Essex to return to county boroughs for what is currently part of the county of Essex while the rest remains a shire county as a unitary authority. That is quite possible.

5.15 pm

Of course, we must make sure that the consultative process allows people to consider what the county would be like if we took out parts of it. However, county boundaries have changed. Counties such as Cambridgeshire have incorporated more than one county in the past. Therefore, the total geographical area of a county has changed over the years, and under that county structure we might find that people want district councils. It would be quite appropriate for the people of Cornwall to say that they want two tiers of government, a Cornish county council and five district councils. To say that they must have only one and that they must opt for a unitary authority flies directly against the wishes of many people throughout the country.

From experience, I know that people in some parts of Britain would be happy to have a unitary authority. The people of Herefordshire resented greatly the amalgamation with Worcestershire. They would be happy for the county of Herefordshire as it now is to be a unitary authority. If, for example, we were discussing a Welsh authority such as Powys, which is a huge county, it would be entirely right for the people to say, "We want a two-tier government. We might be happy with the county of Powys, but we would also want the local district to be Brecknock or Breconshire." I do not see any incompatibility in having unitary authorities in some parts of the country and two-tier government in others. The Labour party is going down its traditional road of wanting everything in one-form terms. Britain is not a one-form society; it is much more pluralist and diverse. Regions and countries are different, and we should respect that and allow people to decide.

Mr. Blunkett: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman, in describing the situation that he foresaw in Essex, inadvertently used the term "unitary" in relation to the remainder of the county. We have never said that we are against the idea that a part of a county or, in very exceptional circumstances, a county itself could not be the unitary authority. We have left our minds open. Nor would we be against an authority which, in our terms, would be described as a region with districts under it, such as the one that the hon. Gentleman described for the south-west peninsula, although we are against the district county and regional model with one tier on top of another

tier until everybody cries for mercy because of the number of elections that are held and the number of people who are held responsible.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that our proposition ensures that we can retain parish and town councils, perhaps with enhanced status, which would satisfy the pluralism and diversity of which he spoke.

Mr. Hughes: May I return to parish and town councils in a moment? They are a different debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne and I, and many other hon. Members, are committed to the idea of parish, town and community councils and believe that they should continue.

The debate is both technical and a much wider political debate. I may have inadvertently suggested that Essex minus unitary county boroughs would leave a shire which could not be other than unitary. That is not our view. There could be a two-tier structure. There could be the county of Essex, with its cricket, history and all the rest, and under it a local district authority reflecting the local community. The fact that the county had lost some of what is currently Essex does not mean that it would not be possible to have two-tier government.

Let us take the south-west peninsula. The hon. Member for Brightside will not make his cause popular in the south-west. The people of Cornwall want to be Cornish. They want to be governed as Cornwall, not the south-west peninsula. They may be in favour of regional government devolved from Whitehall, but they certainly do not want to give up Cornwall for some greater south-west region with tiers only below that.

Mr. Blunkett: I did not say that.

Mr. Hughes: Well, the people of Cornwall do not want to belong to the south-west peninsula. They want to belong to Cornwall, not Devon and Cornwall. On many occasions that is the cause of their resentment.

Mr. Blunkett: I will not keep the hon. Gentleman long, but I do not want an avalanche of letters from the south-west peninsula. I was referring to the possibility of regional government. I am happy to accept the Cornish wish to be Cornish. Indeed, many have written saying that they want a region with districts under it. That is different from being a county. They certainly do not want a west region that stretches from Wiltshire all the way down to Cornwall. Given that the hon. Gentleman's party is in favour of regions, perhaps he will enlighten me on whether he is also in favour of that.

Mr. Hughes: I had David Penhaligon as a colleague for many years and now have his successor. There are many other strong Cornish voices in my party, including not only those who run our county council in Cornwall. So I assure the hon. Gentleman that if we ever dared to suggest a western region from Wiltshire to Cornwall we would be in considerable difficulty. We do not suggest that, and we never have.

It is important that we should be clear about our respective positions. Both the Labour party and my party believe in regional government. In that context, the debate about smaller geographical units—Devon and Cornwall, or Cornwall on its own—is yet to be resolved. The aspirations of the Cornish are to their own nationality. They would put it as strongly as that. My point was that for unitary local government anything larger than Cornwall would be unacceptable. I know that from my visits and conversations with people there.

I wish to put in a strong plea to the Minister; I think that he will be sympathetic to it. It is about the wording of new clause 3 and other similar new clauses. The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) has tabled a new clause which I guess comes from the same thought process and idea. I make a strong plea for smaller communities, especially in metropolitan Britain. Greater London—the area which both the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities and I represent—has suffered greatly as a result of the 1965 reorganisation of local government. So far the Government have resisted responding to voices in Greater London while they have not resisted voices elsewhere.

In this debate I am not arguing about the need for a regional authority for London. The Minister knows that my party and the Labour party believe that there should be such an authority. I am arguing about the natural local tier of local government. If I understand new clauses 3 and 14 aright, the local government commission will be asked to take account of certain objectives. New clause 14 describes them as:

> "(a) to identify areas within which people expect to obtain most of their everyday services;
>
> (b) to establish local government boundaries that facilitate the meeting of people's needs and the respecting of existing social organisation".

In London, that means areas smaller than boroughs of 215,000 people.

I want to put this point simply to the Minister. I am sure that he understands it, because he is a London Member. In London there is no legitimate tier of democracy below the London borough. I do not know the exact figures for Enfield—the Minister's borough—but Southwark consists of about 215,000 people. So the lowest tier of local government represents a community of about a quarter of a million people.

In London one is not allowed by any process to set up a parish or community council. Anomalously, London is the one part of Britain that is excluded by law from having such councils. I have sought to correct that by means of a London local government Bill in the past. I beseech the Minister to say in response to the debate that he and his colleagues are not against the commission recognising, as implied by the wording of the new clauses, that, for example, people in Southwark say loudly—as they do—that they want smaller borough councils and allowing them to have such councils. They want the size that they knew and could cope with, which was relatively small. If we are to allow district councils in the shires of England, we should allow smaller borough councils in the urban areas.

Mr. O'Brien: Before the hon. Gentleman moves off the point about smaller local authorities, is he saying that the functions of unitary authorities in the shire areas should also be passed to the smaller authorities that he envisages in the metropolitan areas?

Mr. Hughes: Our view is clear. The hon. Gentleman's party and mine agree that there should be a strategic authority for London to take on strategic planning, economic development and other functions. If we had such an authority, we should also have smaller borough councils, as we previously had, to administer matters such

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as housing, social services and other provisions. Such a council is far more likely to deliver a user-friendly service. My local authority runs 60,000 properties. That is the housing stock of Southwark. That point has been made by other colleagues. It is effectively incapable of running that stock in a way that is responsive to the needs of the individual. People feel like numbers and are treated like numbers. I do not suggest that the hon. Gentleman does not appreciate that. People want a community service that is sufficiently close for them to feel that it is the same place. I will illustrate that simply.

A local authority in an area such as inner London may say to someone on the housing waiting list, "You cannot have a house in the place where you have lived all your life. You will go seven or eight miles away to a community which is completely different." For example, a person may be sent from Rotherhithe to Dulwich or Sydenham. But that is like saying to people in Halesowen that they must move to a village in south Herefordshire. That is the difference that is involved. It is bad for communities and for building up communities to do that. It is also expensive for the public purse. If communities and families are separated, they become dependent on public authorities for social support and not on the family and community that they know and love.

New clause 13 makes a simple proposition. It says:

"The Local Government Commission shall, in making recommendations under this Part, have particular regard to the need to secure effective planning for environmental purposes."

All of us who have taken part in the debate about how best one can plan for environmental purposes know that it is important to consider what is the best tier of local government for planning. It is no secret that the planners of Britain—bodies which are competent and respected, such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England—are worried that if unitary government were imposed or if the county councils disappeared, the best tier for planning would disappear.

In certain subject areas we plan badly at present. For example, there are no coherent planning strategies for development planning along estuaries. When people are trying to protect wildlife, the countryside, fishing, birdlife or whatever, it is no answer to say that the county or local authority boundary goes up the middle of the estuary: on the right there is Essex and on the left there is Kent or on the right there is East Sussex and on the left West Sussex. There is often a need for coherent policy for coastal, marine and estuarial protection. I am aware that there is a specific new clause on estuarine and coastal areas. We will probably not reach it. I am using them as an example and I hope that the Minister accepts that. There is a good case for saying that one ought to consider that sort of issue together and consider environmental aspects.

The commission ought to decide whether a boundary will allow for a structure that will take into account environmental, planning and demographic considerations. My hon. Friends and I ask the House and the Minister to accept that it would not be harmful for that obligation to be imposed on the commission. We are not saying that it should take precedence, but it should be added to its lists of objectives.

I hope that the new clause will be acceptable, either in its existing form or in some other. My hon. Friends and I dissent from the implied assertion of the hon. Member for Brightside. We expect that the Bill will become law before the general election, whenever that is. No doubt, the aim of the guillotine is to achieve that. On that basis, let us get it right as far as we can now. If the new clauses are acceptable and advantageous let us pass them. I hope that new clause 13 in particular, and new clauses 14 and 3—although I am not a signatory to the former—will be acceptable to the Government and will find their way into the Bill when we vote.

5.30 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Both the previous speeches had a common theme—let us get it right this time. I shall be the third person to say that. We do not often get a chance to put right fundamental wrongs about local government. Whatever the outcome of the general election, the Bill is probably here to stay, in some form or other: for heaven's sake, let us get it right while we are about it.

I shall comment briefly on new clauses 3 and 13 and speak to my two new clauses 14 and 17. Before I do so, I must make a couple of general remarks. First, I must thank two people. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) had the unenviable job in Committee of moving an amendment standing in my name which focused on the importance of local people to this debate, as distinct from councillors and council officers. My hon. Friend expressed my views accurately on that matter and I am grateful to him. It was a thankless task to try to work out what I was trying to say and he said all that needs saying—from my point of view—on the question of local people. If hon. Members wish to pursue the matter, I refer them to columns 521 and 522 of the *Official Report* of Standing Committee D on the Bill.

I must also thank my hon. Friend the Minister of State who, from time to time, has said nice things about the influence that I seem to have had on parts of the Bill. I am grateful, but I think that he would expect me to say that I am sorry that he took on board only some of the things that I had to say. I shall make one last attempt to persuade him to accept the rest.

The second general point is that I deliberately did not seek to intervene on the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) because I want to couch my remarks in non-party terms. That is why I did not take him up on arguments that I disagree with. I shall try to express my remarks in a way which will not excite him, although he will disagree with some of them. What I have to say could well raise a few eyebrows on both sides of the House. For example, I agree with much of what the Labour party has said today and previously, but I fundamentally disagree with some things which they have got wrong, and will say so. Also, the Government are correct in principle in what they are trying to do, but they have to get some of the detail right. Hopefully, there will be a bit of give-and-take on both sides of the House.

I agree with five of the seven points which the Labour party lists in new clause 3, although one of the five is incomplete. The trouble with three of the aspects of the new clause that I agree with is that they do not define in clear terms exactly what they mean. Let me explain. First, the Labour party stresses in new clause 3 the importance of local communities, but does not say what they are and how it would establish them. However, it is right—local

communities are important. Secondly, the Labour party refers to the importance of local government, but does not define exactly what it means. Thirdly, it says that the Bill must be understood by electors. My only quarrel with that is that it must be understandable to electors, residents, users of services and everyone else—not merely to electors —but that is a small point. Fourthly, the clause states that the whole system needs to be accountable, but does not describe what that means. However, I agree in general terms.

Where I fall out in a big way with Opposition Members is when they talk about service delivery. They seek to make that the same thing as defining local government when it is a separate issue. They also seek to draw into the new clause matters which I would describe as regional. They see them as part of strategic local government. For reasons that I shall explain, I do not believe that service delivery is the same thing as local government.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said that he hoped that new clause 13 would commend itself. The sentiments in the clause are worthy and I support them entirely, but they have nothing to do with the Bill. If the new clause was tabled in a service delivery context, I would have no difficulty in supporting it.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey said that we must define natural local communities but then said that if they do not suit environmental protection we should draw up something else. He cannot have it both ways. He is right that we must have some way to deal with an entire estuary, to take his example——

Mr. Simon Hughes: I did not say that. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that one must define natural communities. However, environmental considerations should be taken into account by the Boundary Commission. They should go into the balance.

Mr. Wilshire: I shall pursue that later as it will become clear why I disagree and why that is not an issue when describing natural communities.

New clauses 14 and 17 seek to set out additional detail, which the Labour party has left out, and I hope that it will find them acceptable. The clauses also seek to show why service delivery must be separated from this discussion.

My new clauses seek to do five things. Paragraph (a) of new clause 14 seeks to define a local community for the purposes of the local government commission; (b) gives a definition of local government which is intended to make it clear to the commission what it is supposed to be setting up; (c) deals with the question of accountability and what the future of local government should be; and (d) seeks to separate out service delivery. New clause 17 explains how service delivery could then be dealt with differently.

We all agree that we want to define local communities, but what do we really mean by them? Most discussions that I have been party to, or listened to, start with the assumption that there is one thing called a local community and that all we need to do is to discover what it is, draw boundaries round it and all will be well, and we will not have to come back in two years to try to put it right. The trouble with that analysis is that we all belong to several different sorts of local community. It is vital that we understand the differences between them.

Let me give some examples of types of communities. We all belong to a household of some sort, we all come from a village, a street or a housing estate; we all come from a town or a rural area, and from a county or a region. They are all local communities in one form or another.

If the local government commission is to get it right it needs to know which of those local communities it is supposed to be focusing on. All those communities have two things in common, which is why they are often confused. They are all part of the natural way in which human society organises itself. There are households, villages, towns and counties and, whether we like it or not, they are there and do not rely on Government to define them. Secondly, they are all territorial. One has only to look at what happens on the beach when one tries to stake out one's territory to realise how desperately territorial we all are.

Mr. McCartney: Who would risk lying on a beach under this Government?

Mr. Wilshire: I expect that you would rule me out of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I were to respond to that stupid intervention on beaches.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): The hon. Gentleman should learn to be diplomatically deaf, as I am sometimes.

Mr. Wilshire: I am practising that, Madam Deputy Speaker. Perhaps you could give me some instruction on it at some other time.

The point about natural communities is that they are territorial and part of human organisation, but when we define them none of them owes anything to service delivery. As well as the differences between them, another aspect has been overlooked in the debate. Each community has a particular focus.

The household, for example, focuses on daily life. Anyone who does not consider that the household is part of social organisation should listen to those who argue for women's rights. They would then understand that there is a clear social organisation in the household, which women want to change. In the village, the street and housing estate the community focus is on self-help and in the town or area the focus of people is on the area within which their services will be delivered. When we consider counties or regions, we become locked into the issue of sub-cultural differences. I mention that because it is absolutely vital to note that, unlike the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, I have not referred once to a sense of identity because each type of natural community has a sense of identity. It is no use appealing to a sense of identity when trying to establish local government because each community has it.

If the household is a commune, its members will identify strongly with that community. If one asks a village resident in rural England, he will say that it is the place with which he identifies fiercely. If one speaks to the residents of the Falls road in Belfast, they will say that they identify strongly with that street.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): Brookside.

Mr. Wilshire: Yes, one could take that example. If one speaks to the residents of the Broadwater Farm estate, one will understand how closely they identify with it. Consideration of the question of identity will get us nowhere. If one speaks to people from York, they will say

[Mr. Wilshire]

that they identify with that town, but they will then take a further leap and say that they identify with Yorkshire. We have awful trouble in pursuing the issue of a sense of identity to establish what we mean by natural community for the purposes of local government. We all identify with many different communities of different sizes and we have to be careful when we consider them.

The second key issue that lies behind my new clauses is what we mean by local government. I broadly agree with the hon. Member for Brightside on what represents a good and secure future for local government. There are two definitions of local government. The first is that it is simply a vehicle for the delivery of local services; the second is that local government is part of the social fabric. The recent debate among Members on both sides of the House has tended to focus almost exclusively on local government as a vehicle for the delivery of services, which makes it an appendage of central Government. The hon. Member for Brightside said that it is increasingly being seen as an appendage. Conservative Members may have considered local government in that light, but Labour Members have also tended to do so.

The local government commission must avoid that and see local government as part of the social fabric and as something that can neither be created nor got rid of. If we consider local government in that way, we shall arrive at its true role and see it as part of society's organisation.

We arrive at local government's true role by my analysis of different types of community because each type focuses on something different. Each has a different role and that is their significance. The household may be informal, but it is an organisation. The village, street or housing estate has an organisation, which is typically the parish council. I support the view of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey that that concept exists in the countryside in medium-sized towns and in the metropolitan areas. That is part of the natural fabric, but the snag is that that concept does not equate to local government. We delude ourselves if we start talking about local government structures needing parishes in London. Social organisation requires them, but not local government. That is the key to my argument.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that an anomaly exists in one part of Britain alone, Greater London, where there is no formal democratic structure through which people can get together on their estates or in their areas to discuss issues? That is wrong and it should be corrected.

5.45 pm

Mr. Wilshire: I support the hon. Gentleman's sentiments, but I question whether there is no structure. When the House deprives people of a formal structure for debate, such structures develop on a self-help basis, for example, with the establishment of residents' associations. I accept that they are not the same as a formal structure, but such associations develop when there is no alternative. That reinforces my point about the natural development of certain structures. The House cannot deny such developments, but it can make them more democratic. However, parish councils, which have a role in the future, are not part of the issue.

It is clear that people expect most of their daily services to be delivered to them by their town or local area. It is that level of organisation which is known as local government. On regions, I accept that a useful purpose could be served by regional assemblies. However, before any Opposition Member writes that down for future use against me——

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: It is too late.

Mr. Wilshire: No, it is not too late because we both mean something totally different.

I dispute whether one can effectively divide England, in sub-cultural terms, into the type of artificial regions for which some argue. Regions, in common with parishes, are nothing to do with local government—they are entirely separate. It is perfectly possible, as has been demonstrated in this country for a long time, to organise things without regional assemblies. Although I accept the theoretical sense of that particular model, that does not mean that I agree with their establishment. Should Opposition Members seek to dig out my comments to throw them back at me in the future, I hope that the detailed record will demonstrate that I am not as supportive of their case as they would like to think.

The other issue arising from my new clauses was mentioned several times in Committee by the hon. Member for Brightside—he hinted at it again today—and it relates to the need to enhance the role of local government. The interesting thing is that the whole House wants to do that. Various options for enhancing local government, including making it more accountable and democratic and improving its management, have been argued to and fro. The trouble with such an approach is that, unless one understands the role of local government, how in heaven's name can one enhance it? The new clauses will draw out for the local government commission exactly what the basic role of local government should be.

It will come as no surprise to people to learn that my approach rests on the concept of natural communities, which represent different levels of organisation. The role of local government is revealed by an analysis of natural communities. Just as each natural community focuses on something different, so the necessary level of organisation, be it parish council, local council or even regional assembly, which represents people in the community focuses on something different.

My analysis of communities has fundamental implications, which may, I fear, be unpalatable to both sides of the House. However, that analysis gives local government the opportunity to have a worthwhile, respected and secure future. Natural communities secure a healthy role for local government because the natural communities that we call local government—social territories, as I referred to them at the outset—are areas within which local people expect their needs to be met by local services.

It is clear from talking to local people about their services that they do not mind who runs a particular service. If people say, "We need a new supermarket; we do not have a decent supermarket in our area", they could not care less whether the supermarket is owned by somebody who lives in the town or in London or Glasgow. They simply know that they want a local supermarket. The issue of who owns what and provides what does not fire up people, which is no doubt why Labour Members will not take kindly to my analysis of the situation. Some of my

hon. Friends may not take too kindly to it, because when one speaks to local people about their needs they do not differentiate between needs that are met by services provided by local government and those met by anybody else. When they say that they want their needs met by services, they mean services in general.

If the role of local government means being involved in the provision of needs with services, local government must have a say in the provision and delivery of all services, not just those that it seeks to control for itself.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. My experience is that services provided by local government are better appreciated than are services provided by other bodies because locally provided services are identified with local people. They identify, for example, with local councillors or officials, rather than with a distant provider. To cite the example of a supermarket does not fit into this category because that is a straightforward shopping area. With services in general, particularly in small rural areas, people identify with services provided by their local authority.

Mr. Wilshire: The hon. Gentleman seems not to have understood the point I was making, which is that local people do not distinguish between services in the way he describes. The hon. Gentleman may think that certain services are better delivered by local government. I do not dispute that. But people do not compare the health service with local government services, supermarkets, solicitors or the water supply. They look at all services, irrespective of who supplies them, and the only point I am making in that context is that nobody would expect local government to deliver every service that local people use. I am sure that we can agree on that, and certainly we can agree that local government should not provide supermarkets.

The debate has focused almost exclusively on the services that local government controls. The hon. Gentleman's intervention made that point. But the real role of local government concerns all the needs of the people whom it represents and all the services that they require. So the role of local government is not the delivery of services but the addressing of needs. Hence the whole question of the enabling authority and meeting needs rather than delivering services. That is how the question arises because the real role of local government is to analyse the needs of all people, irrespective of the service, and to articulate the concerns and local priorities of all people.

Having done all that, it seeks to provide, if that seems appropriate, or to persuade others to provide, or to criticise other providers, or to assist in the provision of whatever service may be in question. Such assistance occurs from time to time, for example, by allowing planning permissions which might be socially desirable whereas, in the context of planning policy, it might not necessarily be so kindly disposed to grant permission. Rate or rent breaks and similar issues are other examples.

I argue that all of those activities are of equal worth. Yet for long we have been locked into a debate only about those services that local government itself delivers. That very debate brings local government into disrepute, not least when we say that it should not do it and Opposition Members say that provision is all that matters. In other words, local government has a role to play in all those service matters, but it makes no difference if the service deliverer is private or voluntary sector or even central Government. Local government is involved in the whole process.

Mr. O'Brien: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the private sector can provide a planning procedure equal to that currently provided by local government? Is he also saying that the first stage of local communities—the parish councils—are not interested in planning? Is he not aware that the first consideration is planning and that people are concerned in the planning of their communities, which means that planning cannot be left to the private sector?

Mr. Wilshire: I did not say that the private sector could be left to deal with town and country planning. If the *Official Report* shows that I said that, the hon. Gentleman is right to criticise me. If he asks whether I believe parishes have a role in this whole process, the answer is that by saying that a community focuses on an issue as its prime concern does not mean that it must close its mind to everything else. It has a lesser role. I was identifying with the key or central role, and I appreciate that other interests come into this.

I maintain that service delivery is fundamentally different from the whole question of local communities, and this bears on a point made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey. Local communities as I have described them are biological, social and stable; a natural community is natural whether it is big, small or of medium size.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Did the hon. Gentleman vote in favour of the guillotine? Does he intend to talk out the Bill?

Mr. Wilshire: If I wanted to learn how to waste time and make the debate on my new clause continue until 10 o'clock, I would only need to study the Standing Committee reports to have a wonderful example of how to filibuster. Such tactics were regularly adopted by Opposition Members. I have not spoken for nearly as long as some Labour Members spoke in Committee. I have at least another hour and a half to go before catching up with the sort of length at which they spoke. I do not intend to delay the House for that length of time, but I must develop the point I was making about local communities being social and stable entities.

Service delivery depends greatly on technology and management and on being able to change the shape and size of things. That is the opposite of what a natural community is. The trouble is that both are territorial. Natural communities are territorial, as is service delivery, which is where the trouble starts. There is a temptation for people to try to make social territories and service delivery territories coincide. That is why we ended up in 1974 with artificial territories. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey wants smaller territories. In fact, he wants natural territories, whether they are small or big. I should have thought that the Scilly Isles, with a population of 2,000 people, was a natural community. Birmingham, with I do not know how many people, is probably also natural.

Mr. McCartney: Will the hon. Gentleman explain what he means by social relationships and communities never coinciding with service delivery areas? That cannot be true for basic services such as waste disposal and collection. The development of household waste disposal services must relate to the houses from which the refuse is

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collected, which means that the service must be based on the structure of the community, simply because the waste is collected from the community.

Mr. Wilshire: No, the hon. Gentleman is wrong. The key point about emptying dustbins is that they are emptied from the back doorstep or the end of the drive. That is the important point, not whether the person coming to empty them is organised from Glasgow, London or locally. The point at which such a service is organised is of no consequence to the concept of the social community. The dustbins are in exactly the same place wherever the management is located.

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Every organisation except local government—that specialised area about which Opposition Members are so concerned—fully understands that the delivery of services is best organised service by service, that the territories for each service are unique to it, and that the optimum size of a service territory depends on the service. For example, one has only to compare the areas in which the national health service operates with those in which the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food operates to understand that Ministries do not have the same service delivery areas. If we consider quangos and agencies, we find that the driving territories of the vehicle licensing centre at Swansea are totally different from the territories of the National Rivers Authority because they provide different services. In the voluntary sector, the Royal National Institute for the Blind organises its service delivery entirely differently from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; they offer different services with different optimum territories. In the private sector, no one would expect the regional organisation of Marks and Spencer to be the same as that of Tesco.

If everywhere else there is a clear understanding that service delivery territories should be determined on a service-by-service basis, why do we desperately try to force local government service territories to fit social territories? That is where all the trouble comes from.

If my analysis is correct and the Government are to separate the defining of social territories from service delivery territories, how are we to deal with the anxieties that have been expressed about the chaos that might follow? The hon. Member for Brightside expressed that anxiety and asked whether the measure would lead to the decimation of service delivery. New clause 17 seeks to deal with that. It says that the local government commission should define social territories and look for natural community areas in which people expect to receive services. Once those new unitary authorities have been set up, they will take over the functions of the existing district. There would be no difficulty with that because it would be a small change.

A possible approach would be to place the services provided by the county councils under the care of a "service trust", which would handle the services that county councils deliver now. They would take over the running of those services in the short term, while the unitary authorities work out ways to handle these services. Thus the service would continue, service trusts would be set up and, once the unitary authorities had found their feet, they would either draw up contracts with the service trusts or they would ask a body like the Audit Commission whether they could take over a service themselves. In a separate process, the Audit Commission would then judge the best service delivery territories.

I support five sevenths of new clause 3. I would support new clause 13 if it were relevant, but my hon. Friend the Minister of State should think seriously about new clauses 14 and 17. I hope that he will accept them, but I suspect that he cannot at this late stage. In that case, I hope that he will think seriously about the guidelines that have been issued because I find it difficult to support them as they stand. If the Bill cannot take on board the points that I have made, the guidelines must do so. Otherwise, we shall not get it right and, whoever is next in government, we shall find ourselves in this same position again and again.

Mr. McCartney: Before the guillotine falls, I wish to make a brief contribution about the duties of the local government boundary commission. I expressed my concern on Second Reading, in Committee and during the debate on the guillotine motion, about the commission's role in taking evidence locally and its procedures for making recommendations.

I am worried about how the Government have set up the local government boundary commission's role in the Bill, because they have left out a unique and important part of it. The Local Government Act 1972 obliged the commission to seek the views of local authorities, local representatives and local community groups. It also made it clear that local people, having looked at the first draft of the boundary commission's recommendations, could make representations before a final decision was made. I have listened carefully to the Minister during previous debates, but I am unclear whether an appropriate appeals procedure will exist in respect of local investigations. That is important, although I do not see it as a party-political issue in the sense that the Government are controlling and managing the commission. A Secretary of State of any political party will be able to manipulate the commission's decisions if an appeals procedure is not set down in the Bill so that local people can have a real say in determining the final decision to be made, via the commission, by the Secretary of State.

The local government boundary commission is currently reviewing the position in England and Wales, and has made recommendations in my area and the neighbouring area of Knowsley. The initial decision would remove Knowsley borough council from the political and administrative map of England. Its services and geographical area would be added to various other local authorities in Lancashire and Merseyside, such as Liverpool local authority. However, through the appeals procedure more than 70,000 local objections were registered with the boundary commission. That weight of objection determined the outcome, and the boundary commission changed its recommendation.

The Bill will not give local people the ability to register an objection before a final decision is made by the Secretary of State if the local government boundary commission suggests either a partial change or total abolition of an authority. Furthermore, voluntary organisations cannot make proposals about the nature of the local authority, its geographical spread or its management. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House have been involved in all forms of activity in the voluntary sector, working with youth, children, housing

and the disabled. More than 600 types of voluntary organisation operate on a daily basis, directly or in conjunction with local authorities, in the delivery or preparation of services. Yet the Bill gives no idea how the voluntary sector can be involved in the consultation procedure as to the nature of the local authorities to be set up and the type of service that they will provide.

It is important that the Minister states clearly what he intends to place in the Bill or in regulations. Local organisations and, more importantly, community groups should have a statutory right of appeal when the boundary commission first makes proposals to the Secretary of State. They should be able to object to the proposals, and hearings should be held locally and not just at the commission's or the Department of the Environment's headquarters at Marsham street.

What guidelines will the Secretary of State lay down for the commission on setting out the procedures for local authorities and on the consideration of amendments to be put forward by the commission? The Bill is seriously flawed because it does not show how the commission will proceed in considering local areas of administration. The Secretary of State has already recommended the abolition of certain local authority units in north-east England and the midlands. Given that he has already intervened, how will the commission proceed in relation to the rest of England?

The Minister has not made it clear in the Bill or in discussions in Committee whether a statutory period of consultation will be set down, to be publicised locally through newspapers and other means, whereby the commissioner has to follow a strict timetable for the consideration of evidence sent in by local communities. The commissioner should publish his views on that evidence and set down another strict timetable within which those views should be considered and recommendations made.

The Minister owes it to the House to give a clear sign as to what input there will be from local communities. If the commission is to work and to be accepted as a non-political organisation which will not be manipulated by Government, we must have those safeguards. More importantly, local communities must have the ability to influence the commission's decisions.

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): I wish to make a brief point about the financial constraints latent in new clause 3, which are not so specific as I would wish. There is an important need to assess the economic cost of change in the local government review process. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said on Second Reading that considerable weight had been placed in the draft guidance on the need to demonstrate that there is an economic case for change.

Paragraph 14 of the draft guidance states that

"change to the structure of local government should be worthwhile and cost effective."

Given the inevitable upheaval and cost involved in reorganisation, I warmly support the Government's emphasis on the need for proper justification in cost terms. In that connection, I welcome the issue on 11 February of the so-called CSL report, which the Government commissioned to advise both on costs and benefits relevant to the work of the commission and on a consistent methodology against which the commission can judge proposals for change. That is a reassuring recognition by my right hon. Friend of the central importance of assessing costs and benefits in the forthcoming review.

I believe that the report is currently out for consultation with local authority associations. It is a useful starting point, and effectively dispels any notion that a blank cheque approach will be taken to that aspect of reorganisation. However, it was not always thus. The cost of the last major local government reorganisation, in 1974, was not evaluated at the time and I believe that it has never been fully costed. An estimate of £280 million has been made for the cost of the 1974 reorganisation, but the figure is likely to have been far higher, particularly when one recalls the early retirement pensions of town clerks, borough treasurers and the like, which would continue for some time. I am glad that my right hon. Friend's approach to the present proposals for change is more pragmatic and flexible. Economic cost and cost benefit factors must be properly monitored and measured. I am glad that the adage of the late President Harry Truman, "If it ain't bust, don't fix it", is to be allowed some influence and recognition.

6.15 pm

To return to a theme that I touched on when we last debated the Bill, a case can be made—at least for my own county of North Yorkshire—for keeping a second tier in operation, albeit in an attenuated form, where huge tracts of territory exist in local government terms as in the case of the premier county, the largest in the country.

I wish to put in a good word for the counties which, by and large, have proved themselves prudent and economical units of government. For 1992-93, counties' spending variation from the grant-related expenditure-standard spending assessment formula, before use of reserves, is minus 0·1 per cent., compared with the districts' variation of plus 11·6 per cent. Although they are main service providers, counties will add a mere £5 on average to each charge bill in 1992-93. In the past 11 years, average county spending, which approaches one half of all local government spending, has been just £80 million above the Government's desired level, compared with spending by other authorities taken together of £1·3 billion above the Government's desired level. I hope that the local government commission will not disregard a system which produces such budget-conscious authorities.

Mr. Wilshire: My right hon. Friend is quoting from the voluminous paperwork of the Association of County Councils. Everything that he is saying relates to service delivery. The trouble is that some of the natural communities which exist do not conform to the big, centralised form of service delivery approach argued by the ACC.

Mr. Alison: I fully appreciate that the ACC has deposited on us a voluminous amount of facts and figures, and I have worked hard to boil them down to a five or 10-minute speech, as I believe that they are valid.

I shall open up the cost benefit analysis in more detail. The initial assessment of the Associaiton of County Councils is that the creation of unitary authorities based on present districts would cost more than £300 million per year for management and administration, compared with the present system, which is a substantial net addition to local government costs. Those costs represent the cost of breaking up 39 counties with 88 per cent. of the

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expenditure, as against abolishing 296 districts with 12 per cent. of the expenditure. We must recognise that a district takeover of the county councils would lead to twice as many management structures, chief officers, and so forth.

Mr. Martlew: The second tier of officers within the county council structure is often organised on a district level, so could we not cut off the top tier and make the second tier the chiefs of the new districts, thus saving money?

Mr. Alison: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. I am not saying that the case is proven that the counties—even my own county of North Yorkshire—should stay as they are, or that the districts are too small and numerous to be the order of the day. I am saying that we need to evaluate the costs involved. I am not saying that those rather startling cost figures should be decisive. I fully support the argument that weight should be given to community identity and loyalties—as my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) strikingly brought out in his speech—if we are to have effective and convenient local government as set out in the commission's brief.

We all know and accept that democracy can be costly, just as justice under the rule of law cannot be had on the cheap. The notion of effective and convenient local government, however, includes the idea of economical and stable local government. We must not lose sight of the fact that small authorities might not be viable in terms either of the unit cost of their services, or of the stability and robustness of their finances—and some districts are very small.

Services in 250 districts account for less than £15 million per year. County council services on average account for £500 million per year. The idea of course is that the district minnows should grow a bit and the county Titans should decline a bit. But let no one imagine that an Alice-in-Wonderland medicine, simply labelled "Take Me", as in the famous story, will produce the changes in size, as it did for Alice, with no prescription charge payable for the medicine. The change will cost money.

The recent publication of the CSL report and the Government's intention to issue detailed guidance to the commission on the way to assess the costs and benefits of structural change are timely, essential and welcome. This time we must cost the menu in advance. Together, the criteria set out in the Bill and the proposed guidance to the commission will help to give us a durable and sensible basis for decision-making about future local government structure and the extent to which change is needed. I hope that my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Minister of State will give continuing attention to the validity of the cost evaluating structure which they have reasonably and sensibly built into the system of the commission's review.

Mr. Gordon Oakes (Halton): I shall be very brief, although, like many other hon. Members, I wanted to say a good deal. We are governed by a guillotine motion and I must defer to my hon. Friends—indeed, to hon. Members on both sides of the House. We want to vote fairly quickly, if vote there be.

I consider it shameful for the House to be deprived of an interesting debate on the whole future of local government by the imposition of a guillotine on what is essentially a constitutional Bill—as has been revealed by every contribution to this interesting debate that we have heard so far.

I agree with nearly all of what was said by the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison). Let me issue a plea on behalf of county councils. As I told the House on Second Reading, I am an honorary vice-president—completely unpaid—of the Association of County Councils. Let there be no "oohs" and "aahs"; I do not get a penny for it.

I am proud of what county councils do. They are responsible for 88 per cent. of local government expenditure and, of the vast number who are employed by them—1·25 million—only six in 100 are employed centrally in administration. That means that the counties are giving service to the community.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) should consider these points carefully. County councils meet every one of the criteria specified in new clause 3 and this is our last chance to tell the local government commission exactly what we want it to do. That is the purpose of the debate.

Mr. Wilshire: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Oakes: I am sorry, but I cannot give way, because of the time constraint.

In my view, all the new clauses point to county councils being the most suitable structure to deal with—for example—environment and planning matters, which must be dealt with on a wider basis. That is particularly true of new clause 13, tabled by Liberal Democrats and presented very ably by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes).

I thought at the beginning of the speech by the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) that he was on my side: I went along with what he said about the need for a diversity of authorities. However, when he began to talk about the establishment of a services commission on behalf of unitary authorities, I realised very quickly that he was descending into the undemocratic shambles described by my hon. Friend the Member for Brightside.

If we want effective and convenient unitary authority local government, we should look to the county councils. My hon. Friend the Member for Brightside said that, in exceptional cases, the existing county council might be the proper authority; in my view, that might be the norm, although it is possible that exceptions would evolve from such circumstances.

Winding up the Second Reading debate, the Minister of State said that the county councils might exist, but not necessarily for administrative purposes. I certainly do not agree with that: it would create a sort of Lord Lieutenancy, and county councils would have nothing specific to do.

I am strongly in favour of new clause 13. We cannot have 296 unitary authorities deciding on environmental planning matters, whether they involve a region, the Government, Parliament or any other body. When dealing with the environment, we should start on a world basis and work down, rather than starting on a unitary basis and working up. The environment affects us all.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey rightly mentioned estuaries and the way in which they divide counties. I have encountered a good many problems in regard to the Mersey estuary, because two counties are involved. If responsibility for such matters spread to

include unitary authorities, the shambles referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Brightside would unquestionably result. That applies not only to water, but to air—pollution and the action of CFCs, for example. Such matters must be dealt with initially on a world basis, then on a European basis, and finally—at the lowest level—on a county basis.

I promised to be brief and I have put in my word for county councils. I agree with what the right hon. Member for Selby said about the efficiency of county councils and I strongly urge the local government commission, when considering the future structure of local government—which is so important to democracy—to take into account the historic role that counties have played for 1,000 years. I ask the commission to consider the clear identity that they are given in the minds of individual residents, and the efficiency of county government in this country.

As the right hon. Member for Selby pointed out, the cost of transferring government from county to unitary authorities would be considerable and would greatly disrupt the work of staff. The setting up of a staff commission should be considered, because the Bill will place many jobs in jeopardy, and confusion will result. I urge the commission to give serious consideration to the establishment of county councils as the norm.

Mr. French: I shall detain the House for only a few moments. I wish to highlight the fundamentally illogical position adopted by Labour Members.

In his concluding remarks, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) spoke of the need to enhance local decision making, to ensure that people obtained the services that they wanted and deserved. He referred to the need to give people choice. Those are noble and worthy sentiments, but the hon. Gentleman went on to adopt a position that, in my view, would make it impossible for Labour to fulfil such sentiments. As my intervention elicited reasonably clearly—I hope—the hon. Gentleman would not allow the exercising of choice to extend to a decision by local people that they would prefer two-tier to one-tier authorities.

The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. Either he is deciding to give people proper and meaningful local choice or he is not. If he is, that choice must, by definition, extend to allowing them to opt for two-tier authorities and not imposing unitary authorities on them.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Would the hon. Gentleman also give a vote to allowing locally accountable people to decide whether they wanted regional civil servants to be sent out to govern their lives and make decisions for them? That is what happens at present, but it could easily be dispensed with if they were involved more closely with county councils or with other forms of regional government.

Mr. French: With respect, I do not think that that is the issue that we are discussing. We are discussing unitary authorities. That brings me to what was said by the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney). He, too, seemed to adopt a fundamentally illogical position. He seems astonished to hear me say that; let me explain.

The hon. Gentleman entered what was, in many ways, an understandable plea for appeal procedures to be written on the face of the Bill, so that local objections could be aired and a local hearing could take fully into account the position of local people. That is perfectly reasonable as far as it goes. However, the hon. Gentleman did not go on to explain what would be his position if such an appeal favoured the retention of two-tier authorities. As his party apparently does not believe in allowing such an option, the hon. Gentleman would automatically have to refuse an appeal based on such grounds—and that, surely, is an untenable position.

The right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) put in a strong plea for county councils to become the norm. His speech revealed again the divisions that clearly exist within the Labour party in regard to the Bill. The right hon. Gentleman starts with the preconception that the county councils have so much merit that only in very exceptional circumstances would they be dismantled in favour of a district authority.

The Labour party's approach would force a preconceived formula on to local people, notwithstanding the fact that they may have expressed disagreement about the proposed change, or that they may have expressed a strong preference—possibly as strong as that expressed by residents in the area represented by my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison)—or that they may have said that they would prefer the two-tier arrangement to be retained. The Labour party would deny them that choice and force the single-tier authority upon them. The Labour party cannot claim on the one hand to be the champion of local democracy and on the other to adopt the formula that it has adopted here.

6.30 pm

Mr. Martlew: My right hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) has, I believe, argued the wrong case. If one wants to argue the case for county councils, the right case to put forward is that made by the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) for a two-tier system. No case can be made out for a unitary authority to be based on the county council of Cumbria. I speak as a former chairman of that county council.

Cumbria is the second largest county, North Yorkshire being the largest. I am appalled by the idea that the county council should have responsibility for housing. It would be impossible to administer. Carlisle and Barrow, the two centres of population, are 90 miles apart. The Association of County Councils ought to have tried instead to keep the two-tier system. I am in favour of the unitary system, as are my Front-Bench colleagues.

New clause 13 deals with environmental protection. I have already asked questions about the future of the national parks. At the end of January the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier), the Minister for the Environment and Countryside, referred to the need for new legislation to cover the national parks. I understand that the proposal is that all national parks should be based on the Lake District and Peak district model.

I am concerned about the funding of the national parks by any local government structure. The Government pay 75 per cent. towards the funding of the Lake District national park. The county council raises a precept for the other 25 per cent. The people of Cumbria, therefore, have to pay £750,000 towards the running of the national park. My constituents have to pay £150,000 towards that total sum of £750,000. No part of the national park, however, forms part of my constituency.

If the national parks are to be affected by any change in local government, we shall have to think again about their

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funding. It is not right that the local population should have to pay towards the cost of running national parks. They are provided for the benefit of the whole nation, not just the local community. National parks lead to local communities having to put up with inconveniences that people who live in other parts of the country do not encounter.

When the Government consider the funding of national parks, they should decide that the local community ought not to be burdened with the precept. If they decide otherwise, may I suggest to them that it is only right that those communities who face the precept should have the right of representation. At present, my local authority has no representatives on the board of the Lake District national park. I hope that the Minister will clarify the role of the local government commission in terms of the national parks.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): I notice a certain restlessness on the Opposition Benches, as though Opposition Members are keen to get to the Division. I shall speak for no longer than is strictly necessary, but I must reply to the points raised in the debate.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) is concerned about smaller communities in London. I am familiar with that question. My own borough, like so many other London boroughs, was previously three different boroughs, so I understand his concern. We have to decide where it would be beneficial to bring about unitary government in England. We are not adamant about its introduction everywhere. Given, however, that that is one of our considerations and given also that London and the metropolitan authorities already have unitary government, we do not propose that the local government commission should look at the structure of local government in London. That will be a disappointment to the hon. Gentleman.

The local government commission will be in existence for a long time. Different views may be taken at different times. The commission will be empowered to look at boundaries in London. That might mean the re-emergence of an historic county that lies mainly within London today —Middlesex. The local government commission might want to consider that issue.

The right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) seems to have misunderstood the position. I have taken no view about whether we should have unitary authorities in some places based upon counties or upon districts. I have not said that counties would be reduced to historic, non-administrative counties. What I have said is that in some places, whatever the result may be regarding the administration of local government, it could be that, when looking at the boundaries, the local government commission might wish to recommend the re-emergence of historic counties on account of the fact that in some places the historic county, in which somebody is deemed to live, is a matter of great concern and consequence.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I am grateful to the Minister for dealing with the point, but will he confirm that there is nothing to preclude, according to the precise wording of the Bill, smaller boroughs—unitary by nature in terms of their powers in London—from being a possible consequence of the commission's recommendations? Furthermore, will the Minister confirm that, separately from the Bill, he will get rid of the issue of the parish, at community council level, which is not governed by the Bill but which is an anomaly because London cannot have that, lowest tier of democratic responsibility and accountability?

Mr. Portillo: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that because boundaries are included in the Bill, that makes it possible to look at boroughs of different sizes. However, I do not want to mislead him. It is not the Government's intention to look towards changing the boundaries of the current boroughs in London. However, I have said that boundary issues can certainly arise in London, both between boroughs and in terms of boundaries that concern historic counties which we might wish to have considered at some point. However, there is nothing in the Bill to exclude the local government commission from considering boundaries and arriving at different arrangements, so long as they remain unitary and do not change the structure of local government in London.

We continue to think about parishes. We may want to publish a consultation paper in due course. That does not commit me to any course of action in London, but it certainly means that the parishes continue to be on our mind.

On the subject of estuaries, when the local government commission reports to the Secretary of State, it may recommend that joint arrangements are necessary. It may even recommend to the Secretary of State that he must impose joint arrangements. The Secretary of State has the power to impose joint arrangements. Therefore, a joint arrangement could be used in the case of estuaries, or in the case of important coastline issues.

Mr. Martlew: Can the Minister deal with the Solway Firth, part of which is in England and part in Scotland? Could joint arrangements be made for the estuary there?

Mr. Portillo: I hope that it will be possible to reach voluntary agreement. As the hon. Gentleman knows, this part of the Bill deals only with England. I recognise that such cross-boundary problems arise, but I hope that they will be dealt with by voluntary arrangements.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) made an interesting and intelligent speech. He has been influential in the drafting of the Bill and the draft guidance that, ultimately, will be considered by the local government commission. He powerfully made the point that there are two different sorts of territory—areas where people expect their needs to be met and areas across which it may be efficient to deliver services to people. I think that he has helped members of the Committee, and now hon. Members, to understand that such differences exist.

The question has always been how much we include in the Bill. I believe that we should include the essense of the local government commission and not try to include every nuance and consideration because it would become extremely unwieldy.

In Committee, the arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne were advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes). On reflection, I have decided that we do not need to amend the Bill. There are two tasks at the heart of the job that we are asking the local government commission to do—it should

reflect the identities and interests of local communities and it should look out for effective and convenient local government.

On the second point, I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne expressed a fear that is not well placed. Perhaps because that phrase is drawn from previous legislation, he has drawn the conclusion that effective and convenient local government means other than effective and convenient for local people. To me, it means convenient and effective for local people, not convenient and effective for local government; nor does it mean convenient and effective to existing institutions of local government. I believe that the consumer comes first.

I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne has made an important point. I do not agree to amend the Bill, but I agree that we need to reflect some of those points in the guidance that we give the commission. My hon. Friend reasonably said that if I was not able to accept his new clauses he would seek an assurance that I would reconsider the guidance. I give him that assurance.

The Bill goes some way to meeting some of the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne made. If one considers together the two needs of reflecting the interests and identities of local communities and of effective local government, it omits the householder in the street but retains the town and county as possibilities. It is extremely important that the commission should listen to local people. As my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne knows, I intend shortly to issue draft procedural guidance that will set out the stages through which I expect the local government commission to proceed in establishing the interests and identities of local communities and the means by which it consults and draws its information.

6.45 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne will be interested in that and in the studies of communities that I shall publish at the beginning of next week. Those studies have considered how communities identify themselves and the geographical data that might help us to identify communities. His comments on that work would be extremely welcome.

The CSL report was welcomed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in a different context from the welcome given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison). My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne is studying that report, and he will have seen in the list of intangible benefits a first attempt to establish a community index, which, among other things, seeks to identify what people regard as important in their local community.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Selby was concerned about structural change. I confirm that that is an important matter, although, as the CSL report says, the costs and benefits that are tangible and easily quantified must eventually be set against the costs and benefits that are intangible and which constitute the community index that I have just described.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) began by regretting that our debate was guillotined. That is his party's fault. Unfortunately, it decided to waste a lot of time in debates Upstairs. I cannot regret that we are giving a fair amount of time to consideration of part II, which is an important part of the Bill. This evening, we have had one of our most serious and effective debates on the subject. If the hon. Member for Brightside wants to get on to part I, that is in his hands rather than mine.

The hon. Member for Brightside expressed regret that there is no consensus on the subject. It took a real effort by the Labour party for there to be no consensus on the structural reform of local government. The initial reaction of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) was to welcome the establishment of the local government commission and the moves being made by the Government. It took an incredible hand-stand—an incredible fixing and changing of the hon. Gentleman's mind—to manufacture some disagreement with the Government.

Mr. Blunkett: Perhaps the Minister will confirm that, on the final day of the Committee stage, I told him that we would be willing to co-operate in the establishment of the commission and its work in return for his being willing to consult us about a balanced and reasonable membership —an offer that was rejected by the Minister.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman is not being entirely accurate. I reassured him that the membership will be balanced. He wished to be consulted not on ballots but on its membership, which is a matter for the Government and will remain so.

There is a danger that, in all this nit-picking by the Labour party, we may miss the importance of part II, which is a remarkable opportunity and a most unusual piece of legislation. It establishes a local government commission to discover how people view themselves and their communities and how they wish to be governed.

The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) wanted to know about the procedures by which the local government commission would proceed. He wrongly thought that there was an appeal procedure under the local government boundary commission. I propose that the local government commission should move in line with the local government boundary commission procedures. It will start a review with publicity and consultation, will take into account the representations that it receives in drawing up draft recommendations, will publish and consult on its draft recommendations, will take account again of representations in preparing final recommendations and will publish and submit its final recommendations to the Secretary of State. There will then be a further opportunity for public comment to the Secretary of State before he makes an order giving effect to the commission's recommendation, which will then be debated in Parliament. It is a process of many stages, which proves that we wish to be reasonable and to take the opinions of local people with us at all times.

What is remarkable about part II is that it enables different structures to emerge in different places. That diversity, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) paid tribute, offends the Labour party. It complains that local people will not be able to shape events, so what does it propose? It proposes unitary authorities everywhere, whether or not people want them. It proposes annual elections everywhere, whether or not people want them. It also proposes a big bang solution with everything done on one day as in the 1970s, even though members of all parties believe that that is not the correct approach.

[Mr. Portillo]

On top of that, the Labour party proposes that we should impose regional government although there is no evidence that most people in England have any wish for it whatsoever. Because of a possible untidiness that might arise in Essex under one of the plans which the hon. Member for Brightside has in mind, it is important to him that the people of North Yorkshire represented by my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby should have no opportunity to argue for two tiers of local government if that is what suits them. The Labour party puts forward its usual solution—everything must be standardised and socialist and, inevitably, short lived.

The hon. Member for Brightside argues about the removal of functions from local authorities. Whenever we discuss finance in the Chamber, the hon. Gentleman complains about the enormous burdens thrust on to local government, but when he wants to argue about structure, he says that all their functions have been removed from them. He does not even blush at the obvious inconsistency between those two positions.

The hon. Gentleman says that he is concerned about satisfying local people, but he has never understood that the case for local government—for people taking decisions about their own lives and what happens in their communities—is not necessarily the same as that for local authorities. He always argues for local authorities, but never argues for local people.

The hon. Member for Brightside also talks about the need for choice in housing and education. All the people who have been living under Labour authorities will have let out a belly laugh when they heard that. The first opportunities in housing and education that have been given to many people have been given under this Government's reforms, a point recently recognised in an article in *The Sunday Times* by two American authors who rightly said:

> "The Conservatives are now building an unbreakable bridge between the Government of this country and the underprivileged who demand better services in education and better services in housing and have suffered from poor services from Labour local government for far too long."

We are offering the House a truly remarkable piece of legislation. It is unusually enlightened in wishing to identify the true aspirations of local people and to translate them into a system of local government with which people can identify. In return, the Labour party can offer only a system of local government devised in Whitehall and imposed on local people all in one go in one big bang, a system which is standardised and socialist in outlook. Hon. Members will no doubt join me in rejecting the new clause and accepting the spirit of part II of the Bill which is a truly remarkable step forward in identifying the interests of local people.

Mr. Michael: It is very disappointing to hear the Minister merely playing to his own Back Benches. In his final paragraphs he threw reason to the wind and ranted through a Conservative central office brief in a way that insulted hon. Members' intelligence. He had to find two Americans to give purported support to the Government's approach to local government. The only bridge between the Conservative party and the underprivileged is the fact that the Government have created the underprivileged and have caused pain and misery to people, not least in the way in which they have attacked local government and the services that people need.

The Minister thought that he detected agitation among the Opposition. What he detected was anger because he and the Conservative party are frustrating debate on important issues affecting the lives of ordinary people. This debate has demonstrated clearly how a guillotine stimulates long speeches from Conservative hon. Members in order to mop up the time available for debate without changing or improving the legislation. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) about the Conservative party's outrageous disrespect for constitutional issues as illustrated by tonight's guillotine. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said, when the Minister says, "It is not our fault", he is merely parroting a ministerial cry which, after 13 years, comes a bit thick.

I shall not be drawn into the debate about counties and districts because I hesitate to be drawn into any argument about local government in England. However, I shall say what I have said to colleagues in Wales. It is a question not of county or district but of the appropriate element of local government for a given area. What is important, and what the Government have run away from, is the setting of the right criteria on which the unit of local government will be decided.

The Minister's reply to the debate gave soft words but no substance. It gave commitments to nothing and reassurance to no one except perhaps to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire)—which is hardly reassuring to us—about the way in which the Minister will give direction to the local government commission. That worries us because we know that there is a hidden agenda to be drawn out after the election were the Conservative party—God forbid that it should be so—again to be in control of this country.

The trouble is that the Minister does not understand the arguments about local government. My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham welcomed the idea of a local government commission, if it were to be done properly. That was also set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) and by those of us who speak on these matters in Scotland and Wales, those of us who care about and who understand local government.

The Minister says that membership of the commission is a matter for Government. We have seen what that means—we have seen it in Wales. I see the Minister of State, Welsh Office, hovering in the background. This is the first time that we have seen a Welsh Office Minister throughout our consideration of the Bill. In Wales, quangos have been appointed and packed with people who have failed to be elected to office in Wales. It is they who run Wales rather than people who have been elected. That is also the future that the Minister wants to impose on the people of England. The Conservative party does not want democracy to obstruct the way in which it runs the country.

The elements of the new clause set out a number of important functions. We might ask why only England will have a local government commission and why, if it is such a good idea, it has been omitted for Wales and Scotland. What is important in each of the three countries is the principles on which local government is reorganised, but that is what the Government have run away from in their approach to the commission.

My hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) rightly reminded us about the commission which considered the boundaries in the 1973 reorganisation. There was a great deal wrong with that reorganisation, but one of the few things that it got right was that it used as building blocks the most local areas with which people identified and of which they felt a part in order to build the units of local government. The new clause, too, seeks to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and to secure the correct units for a structure that is comprehensible to the electors. People care about the unit of government which deals with local affairs, but the Government are not interested in these issues.

In response to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), let me say that we believe that there can be a variety of types of local government which suit different local areas, but the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) got into the county versus district argument instead of considering the unit appropriate for an individual area. It is that consideration which the new clause seeks to impose on the local government commission as the criterion on which decisions are taken.

We talk about promoting accountable local government, but the Government are certainly not interested in that. We also talk about cost effectiveness. The hon. Member for Spelthorne was right to say that it is usually a thankless task to work out what he is getting at. It was fine when he told us that he agreed with five of the seven points in the new clause, but he thinks that it could be better drafted. Unfortunately, he does not know the difference between refuse collection and refuse disposal, and he is clueless about the inter-relation of services appropriate to a local authority.

In the half-baked lecture on sociology to which he treated us, the hon. Member for Spelthorne complained that the new clause does not define what local government is. That is hardly fair because the Labour party, above all, has published documents and has gone into detail about the quality commission. We have said exactly what we think. We have clearly and well defined the nature and functions of quality local government to which we and local government aspire. The hon. Gentleman has criticised precisely what the Government are doing now —failing to define the functions that they consider should be exercised by local government.

7 pm

The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) referred to the size of local government units dealing with housing. The Welsh Office commissioned a report which was published in 1989. It examined housing management in the local authority sector and in the housing association sector. The report was intended to say, "Housing association good; local authority bad." Surprise, surprise! It was an objective report which said that there were strengths and weaknesses in both styles of management. The report was quickly forgotten and buried by the Welsh Office because it was not interested in good practice and it was not interested in the right way to develop housing.

The problem is that the Government's policies have pushed housing associations into becoming too large to deliver the best quality management, which used to be their forte. We need to go back to providing the appropriate service, whether from the housing association sector or from the local authority sector. We do not want the Conservative dogmatism which tries to wipe out one sector so that it cannot make a useful contribution.

The Government approach education by taking matters out of the hands of locally elected representatives. They are killing off the development towards tertiary education which has made such a positive contribution to the lives of many of our young people aged between 16 and 19. They have placed a planning blight on our colleges.

If the Conservative party has its way, local government will be so damaged that there will not be a mechanism for the delivery of community care services. Community care is already a disaster which is being left for us to inherit when the Government go the way that they must before long.

Let us consider services for the mentally handicapped, for the mentally ill and for adults with learning difficulties. The Government have no interest in or understanding of the issues, as demonstrated by the Prime Minister's appalling answer in December. We need local government services to be provided on a basis which understands the local needs of people and which delivers that service in the way that is required by those hidden people.

Economic development, education, child care, transport, housing and planning affect the daily lives of ordinary people and that has not come out of the speeches by Ministers or by Conservative Members. That is why the local government structures that provide those services need to be right, and that is why the Minister and Conservative Members appear to have no interest in and no care for the local government structures that we shall have in future.

I could go on with the list of functions that are important to all of us. Local government cannot exist in a vacuum. It is about people and communities, which the Minister does not seem to understand.

The new clause contains a proposal to provide for the consideration of appropriate strategic issues at a regional level, which is important. It was tragic that today at the Dispatch Box the Prime Minister appeared to rule that out for the people of England, Wales and Scotland. The Prime Minister, Ministers and Conservative Members who will stand for election throughout the country will be held accountable for that. As the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey said, it is an issue that needs to be addressed in detail. If the proposal in the new clause is not accepted, it will not be addressed in detail. We know what direction would be given by the Minister to the local government commission.

In answer to one of my questions recently, the Prime Minister said that he was in favour of subsidiarity. The problem is that the Prime Minister and Conservative Members do not understand the term. The Government are against subsidiarity because they are against passing power and decision making down to the most local level that is capable of dealing with issues and with the delivery of services. The Government are against subsidiarity within the United Kingdom, just as they are against democracy within the United Kingdom.

The Government have failed to accept the simple, healthy, democratic principles which are set out in the new clause. That exposes the Conservative party's aim to kill off local government in the United Kingdom and to dictate to local people what they shall do and what they shall get. It is outrageous for the Minister to accuse the Labour

party of the things of which he and his party are guilty. It is Labour which understands and respects the principles on which local government should be based.

On the Government's hidden agenda, I warn the Minister and the Government that local contract-placing bodies would not constitute local government. The job of local government is to build communities, not just houses. Co-ordination of inter-agency work is important. Law and order, to return to another item that has been abandoned by the Government, is not just a police job; it demands proper local authorities delivering integrated services.

We see today the nonsense of a Government who are out of step with European and worldwide moves to local democracy and the local determination of policies and priorities. We have heard the nonsense of Conservative Members who want to sort out the bit that suits them. They have jumped up to talk about their particular bits of Essex, or wherever, and they are not interested in the whole picture or in the development of integrated local government services, based on the right type of areas to serve local people and to meet the aspirations of local people.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brightside has rightly exposed the Conservative party's outrageous intention to undermine local democracy in the United Kingdom. If the Government, as they appear to intend to do, vote against the new clause, they will demonstrate that they are not serious about the work of the local government commission. Even worse, they will demonstrate that they are not serious and do not care about local government at all. They will be condemned by their votes as surely as they stand condemned by their words and policies.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 191, Noes 276.

Division No. 94] **[7.07 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terence
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia

Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'l's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wiltshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. David Davies.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 4

ESTABLISHMENT OF STAFF COMMISSION

'.—(1) The Secretary of State, after consulting such bodies representative of existing local authorities or of staff employed by such local authorities as appear to him to be concerned, shall by order establish one or more staff commissions and such a commission may be established either for the whole or any part of England.

(2) An order made under this section may contain provisions as to the transfer of any person who is, on such date as may be specified in relation to him in the order, the holder of any office or employment and who is affected by any provision of, or of any instrument made under, this Act and shall contain provision for the protection of the interests of such persons.'.—*[Mr. Blunkett.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Blunkett: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this, it will be convenient to take the following: New clause 18—*Establishment of Staff Commission (No. 2)*—

'.—(1) The Secretary of State, after consulting such bodies representative of existing local authorities or of staff employed by such local authorities as appear to him to be

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

concerned, shall by order establish one or more staff commissions and such a commission may be established either for the whole or any part of England.

(2) Such a commission shall have the purpose of—

(a) considering and keeping under review the arrangements for the recruitment of staff by local authorities affected by orders under this Part and for the transfer, in consequence of the provisions of any such order, of staff employed by such authorities;

(b) considering such staffing problems arising in consequence of such an order, and such other matters relating to staff employed by any such authority, as may be referred to the staff commission by the Secretary of State; and

(c) advising the Secretary of State on the steps necessary to safeguard the interests of such staff.

(3) An order made under this section may contain provisions as to the transfer of any person who is, on such date as may be specified in relation to him in the order, the holder of any office or employment and who is affected by any provision of, or of any instrument made under, this Act and shall contain provision for the protection of the interests of such persons.'

Amendment No. 6, in page 21, line 14, leave out clause 23.

Mr. Blunkett: The greatest asset that any service has is the people who work for it. The idea that to promote the interests of the public service and to be concerned about the quality of the staff who work in it is somehow to be committed to the interests of the provider as against those of the consumer or user is a great mistake.

In the years ahead, we need to restore a commitment to, and faith in, the whole concept of public service. We need people who are willing to serve their local communities and who can give more than simply what is expected of them in exchange for the remuneration that they receive in their wage packet. We need to stimulate and motivate people and make them want to do a good job and provide something for the community, not simply because they are paid but out of a desire to serve.

That is why I make no apology for saying that, if we are to reorganise local government and to ensure a satisfactory transfer of employees from one authority to another, we must establish a mandatory staff commission. The retention of high-quality staff is a prerequisite of high-quality services. If we are to put the interests of users and consumers of the services at the top of the agenda, those who deliver those services and provide for those users and consumers must be considered a key priority.

The establishment of a staff commission is not only about the interests of staff but about the interests of those who use the services. The Government have made a great mistake in believing that, if one privatises essential local services, one can retain the commitment to the job of staff who related to those whom they served and to the communities and neighbourhoods in which they worked. Much has been lost in the scrabble to disentangle local services and their providers from local authorities and the community. The most obvious examples are the village and neighbourhood schools, where the contractorisation of services has meant that, instead of the staff being part of a team—part of an integrated whole—they are merely the servants of a company or organisation that has placed them there to do a job. Another example is the cleaning of buildings. Anyone who has experienced the transition from an in-house service, made up of people who were part of the organisation and who felt some affinity with it, to a service provided by a private company will have discovered to his cost and peril that the staff are no longer committed to the job and the provision of the service but merely to finishing the task as fast as possible and getting off their shift and out of the building.

We live in a society in which motivation depends on bonuses and pay, rather than on commitment to doing a good job on behalf of the people. The Opposition will seek to restore that commitment to public service and the morale and motivation that existed 20 or 30 years ago in local government when the approach was completely different. People took pride in what they were doing. They cared enough to stay on after their normal hours of work were over. They gave a damn about the people with whom they were dealing and would put themselves out in the evenings and weekends to help them. They had an affinity with the neighbourhood and knew what people's needs were.

That approach has been lost, but we believe that the establishment of a staff commission would be one small step towards restoring it. It would reflect the need to ensure that the interests of the community were served by an orderly and sensible transfer of employees from one authority to another. We could thus ensure a degree of stability so that people stayed in their employment long enough to be able to be transferred to the successor authority and did not simply leave the sinking ship while the going was good, taking whatever opportunity arose for them—perhaps in another part of the country.

High-quality staff at every level—from chief officers and senior white-collar staff to those at the sharp end in the delivery of public services—would feel that it was worth their while staying on, keeping the quality of service going in the existing authorities and being willing to transfer in an orderly fashion to the new authority.

The mistake that may have been made back in the early 1970s when the mandatory staff commission was established was that the need to provide quality to the consumer was not set alongside the needs of the provider. The commission was rightly given the clear instruction that it was to look after the interests of those who worked in the service, and the 1974 transfer and compensation package was very fair to staff. That fairness to the staff needed merely to be seen to be complemented by fairness to customers and users.

Taken together, the two priorities make sense; one cannot have one without the other. Users cannot be served without decent, highly qualified and motivated staff and staff cannot be provided with employment or with a task worth undertaking unless quality is a key word on their agenda. Perhaps we have not engaged local government staff enough in debate and discussion about their role in the quality development of services. We have regarded them as pawns who can either be transferred to new employers or replaced with people who have been taken on at a lower cost and for lower wages. Perhaps it is time to ensure that the staff are engaged in the debate and feel that their task and future are bound up with the service that they provide.

It is in that spirit that we wish to promote the concept of a mandatory staff commission, which will not just deal on a piecemeal basis with individual localities but will be seen as essential to the arrangements for the country as a whole. Staff could then feel a continuity of service in the neighbourhood in which they worked and in the work that

they were undertaking, but would also know that there was a wider context in which their service could be valued and that their transfer to another authority could be acquired if that were more appropriate.

It is in acceptance of their role and the ability to enable people to continue doing the job and to be able to transfer to that job within the new framework that we believe that the smooth handover—the transition—can best be maintained by ensuring that everyone is committed to it. If they are not, people will be afraid of the change. Change in this country has always been seen as a threat. In one sense, that has led to a conservatism that would otherwise not be present. That can be avoided in the way that I have described, and with the staff commission working alongside the reorganisation to be undertaken by the local government commission.

That is why we are committed to the notion of the staff commission. We are committed to undertaking it in a more positive way than in the early 1970s. However, there was a commitment by all sides to making it work, and there was success in managing the operation, the compensation regulations and the fair treatment of staff.

7.30 pm

Not all staff will be required to remain in the service. Their severance is important to them and, in terms of good industrial relations, it is important to the wider community. We want the matter to be handled smoothly. In that case, we need it to be done without a backlash or a negative reaction and without the danger of a dispute arising, which would dislocate the new authorities before they started and, of course, would undermine the continuance of the quality of service.

We know that past Ministers have agreed with that—from Sir Keith Joseph, as he was at the time of the reorganisation of local government in London, and his successors under the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) in the early 1970s. They understood then and we should understand today the importance of ensuring that the regulations are enforced, that people's fears are put aside and that people can be seen to work together to ensure that the new changes are not a threat to individuals working in a service, but are a promise of better things to come for those who receive the service.

For those reasons, we have moved new clause 4 and are promoting the idea of a smooth and sensible transfer from one set of authorities, from one set of employees to new circumstances, and protecting staff, pensions and the things that matter to the local community, and ensuring that that can be done in a way that would make sense to anyone outside who was asked what he would do if he were in charge of the process.

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): I hope that the Government will be persuaded to accept the new clause because the House should send a message of support, concern and understanding to all the people who serve our local authorities. That message will be crucial, because those people will have to face a tremendous amount of change. It is important at this stage that we say to them that we have not only valued the contribution that they have made in the past but that we expect the easiest possible transition to whatever lies ahead and that if the local government commission does its work properly, whatever the change and whatever the future is, we value their work now and we will value it in future. Nothing can quantify in monetary terms that message of support.

We have had a decade in which the Government have been sending different messages to those who work in our local authorities, and we have an opportunity tonight of sending a message of support to them.

I shall demonstrate why that message is so important. This morning, I was speaking at a full meeting of East Sussex county council, when the information was given that the county council, in trying to position itself in advance of the local government commission going to Sussex, has taken an extraordinary decision. It will probably conclude at the end of that debate that the agency agreements with four districts within East Sussex for highway matters should be abandoned and that it should take back into the centre of the county council what has run very successfully since 1974—responsibility for employing all staff and undertaking all agency agreements. In other words, it will be a centralisation of the county.

It is obvious why the council is doing that. It hopes that one of the strong cases for devolution to districts will be that they were already successfully undertaking highway matters. One can see the tactic involved. Unfortunately, the pawns are the people who are doing such good work in maintaining our roads and pavements in East Sussex through agency agreements.

I do not know whether the Minister could even intervene. If local authorities throughout the country are to change the supervision of the staff in such programmes in advance of the local government commission being set up, perhaps the Minister should consider whether he has the power to stop local authorities changing their existing arrangements in advance of the commission's work. It seems high-handed of East Sussex county council that it should do so. Having had the matter drawn to his attention, the Minister will want to look at it carefully indeed.

I raise that issue because it is linked with the staff commission. If we have a staff commission and send a message of support to the staff in our local authorities, at least it would be a message of encouragement, whereas the county council's action is a message of complete disruption to the lives and work of people in highways departments.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) asked me to convey Tweeddale district council's concern that the proposals will lead to not only a reduction in the influence of local authorities but a disruption of staff. That council—my right hon. Friend says that he concurs with it—condemns the Government's continued interference in the affairs of local authorities and their continual and unjustified assertion that local authorities are inefficient. Those are commonly held views. They are held not only by Tweeddale county council and my right hon. Friend, but by many people in England, Wales and Scotland. The Government must do something to change that perception.

I shall give one or two more examples of why a statement in favour of a staff commission would send the right messages. The wrong messages are going out at the moment, not just from central Government but from local government. Again, in my own county council, we are aware that the Association of County Councils has already

[Mr. David Bellotti]

spent £0·5 million on lobbying about the Bill. The Association of District Councils has spent a considerable sum, and the staff are observing what is going on. They want the Government to give some reassurances.

My own county council has spent £30,000 on redesigning its logo. The difference between the old and the new logos is the addition of the two words "county council". Local people who work for the county council, trying to deliver a cost-effective service, are saving money left, right and centre and are very concerned when they see their employer wasting £30,000 on a new logo just to add the words "county council". The county council formed a consortium with five other Conservative county councils in the south-east to make representations to the Government.

Those things are happening all the time. We must say to the thousands of loyal, hardworking local government staff who have been with us for years that that nonsense will stop and that the Minister will give a reassurance that their jobs will not go as a result of the profligate lobbying which is going on nationally and by some local authorities.

For those reasons, I warmly commend for serious consideration the idea that the staff commission should be supported.

Mr. Allen McKay: I support the new clause and I hope that the Government will also do so. It is common sense to include a staff commission when considering the reorganisation of local government. I went through several reorganisations, both at the receiving and reorganising ends, while working for the National Coal Board and I appreciate the feelings of the people affected. Not only their jobs but their livelihood and that of their families are affected. People may also be worried about their pensions. Some people may have to retire early and may be worried about the pension that they are likely to receive. Those are just some of the points that a staff commission would take on board.

In Committee I argued for some considerable time that architect services, for example, should not go out to tender. Architects are a classic example of people who work in local government not because of the money but because, first, they like the job that they do; secondly, they believe that the service that they provide is a public service; thirdly, they get a great deal of satisfaction from their job. Such people are looking around at present because they know full well that they could obtain a much better salary by going private. Many private firms are eager to pick up local government architects because of their expertise. A staff commission would help to allay the fears of people such as architects and stop them from moving prematurely, and perhaps unnecessarily, because they would at least have some assurance that all their problems would be taken care of during the reorganisation.

A staff commission is also needed because the local government commission will not just examine local government structure for a few weeks and then give up. Its examination of local government will be an on-going process. Indeed, when the Minister was asked to give an end date for the reorganisation, he said that no end date could be envisaged. I think that that is wise. We do not yet know what will be the terms of reference of the commission. If we do not know what it is to do or what it will examine, there can be no end date. The sheer length of time the commission will deliberate on local government is even more reason to create a staff commission.

Another reason for a staff commission should endear itself to the Government. The 1972 reorganisation of local government was a costly business. No one could believe the amount of money that was spent on officers' salaries in that reorganisation. The cost of local government increased tremendously. It took a long time to find the right balance. All of a sudden, chief officers in local authorities found themselves on the second or third tier of larger authorities. They were happy because their salaries increased to four or five times more than what they received on the old urban authorities. The reorganisation was costly because it was based on the chief officers' salaries. Salaries were enhanced because the area for which the authority was responsible was enlarged and all salary levels increased accordingly. The staff commission could also deal with salaries. It is a question of protecting ratepayers' money.

Local government and therefore local government officials have been under pressure since 1979. There has been a continual battle between central and local government on many aspects. Central Government have squeezed local authority finances and have sought to streamline local authorities. All sorts of pressures have been brought to bear on local government officers. How local government finance officers have stood, and still stand, the problems which the poll tax brought and which the new council tax is bringing, I do not know. Their loyalty to their local authorities has been stretched beyond believable limits. Yet they have coped.

There is great expertise in the finance divisions of local authorities. Finance officers could move out to private enterprise easily and earn lucrative salaries. If those people moved out, the difficulties for local government would be severe. They are the people who spearheaded the financial changes that have taken place recently in local government.

In Committee I also spoke about housing in my area. I cannot comprehend some of the views on housing management expressed both in Committee and in the House today. Why it is not possible for a local authority to manage 60,000 houses, I do not know. No one tells ICI that it is too big to manage. No one tells international firms that they are too big to manage. They are managed. It is effective management that counts.

In my area, all our housing management is devolved to the bottom. Only policy is formulated in the town hall. Once policy is formulated, the tiers below are expected to carry out that policy. Only in overstaffed areas of housing management are town hall officials needed. But people in all the tiers of that management structure will wonder what is to happen to the jobs that they had just settled into.

7.45 pm

If we send out from the House the message that we acknowledge the work that local government staff do and the strains that they are under, that we recognise what will happen in the reorganisation of local government and that some of the fears of staff could be put at rest by creating a staff commission to examine the problems that are bound to arise in the reorganisation, we could keep the loyalty of staff to local government. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said, it seems inconceivable that people of the calibre of local

government officials have stood the pressures for so long for the salaries that they receive when they could obtain much more outside. They have done it because they like local government, but central Government are stretching local government credibility too far and some officers are beginning to wince under the strain.

Some local government officers have left for other areas or other jobs simply because they could see no future in their existing jobs. I do not agree with them. I believe that there is a great future in local government. But if the reorganisation goes wrong, we shall have failed local government staff again, as we failed them in 1972.

The Minister should accept that while the local government commission goes ahead with the reorganisation, a staff commission should be working alongside. The staff commission should be akin to the local government commission. Through those two commissions we could bring local government reorganisation to a successful conclusion.

Neither in Committee nor in the House today did anyone say, "We must get it right this time—we have been too wrong too many times before, and it has been costly in money and staff, and costly in local government work". We now have the chance to get it right. A staff commission will help us to get it right, and that is why we need one.

Mr. McCartney: Not for the first time in the past decade or so, the question of the career structure of local government staff has come before the House. In 1972 the reorganisation of local government caused a major upheaval and there was a redistribution of staff in local authorities. When I talk about staff, I do not mean only chief executives. I am talking about a range of people from the highest to the lowest paid. There is no local authority area in Britain where local government staff do not make a major contribution to the local economy. Therefore, changes in the distribution and size of local authority staff has a direct consequence on local economies as well as on the size of the local authority itself.

The reorganisation is not merely an academic exercise of redistributing jobs in local government from one tier to another or between tiers of local government. In 1972 and 1973 the Government made a commitment to redistribute and protect jobs in the transfer from urban and rural district councils to the new metropolitan county and borough councils and the non-metropolitan county and district councils. There was a mainly smooth transition.

In 1985 we had a reorganisation of metropolitan areas. County councils such as Greater Manchester, Merseyside and West Midlands were abolished. A major disruption took place. In that reorganisation services at county level were completely removed. Local authorities were left with the job of running previously county services. It was up to them to make decisions about the staff that were to be transferred. Luckily, in the mid-1980s local authorities still had the financial and resource base to absorb much, if not all, of the redistribution of staff that had to take place when the metropolitan counties and associated organisations were abolished. That is not the case with this reorganisation. In the past six years there has been a major disruption in the levels of service provided by local authorities and the resources provided to finance them.

Local authority workers not only fear that their jobs will be redistributed out of existence but that, at the end of that redistribution, their jobs could be subject to compulsory competitive tendering, which is extended in the Bill. That adds to the worries and fears of thousands of local government workers for their future in local government. Will their jobs remain in local government in the sense that there will be an orderly transfer and protection of salary levels and pension rights? Will the number of years that they have worked for the authority be considered in connection with holiday and other entitlements? On transfer, will they lose entitlements because they are not transferred to the new authority? Having been transferred, will workers find themselves competing for their own jobs because of the introduction of compulsive competitive tendering?

We have already witnessed the consequences of compulsory competitive tendering for local government workers, and as a result many workers fear that their jobs will be redistributed under the proposed reorganisation.

The Government have refused to accept the concept of the transfer of undertakings. Local government workers whose jobs were transferred to the private sector as a result of the Local Government Finance Act 1988—whose provisions will be extended by this Act—have no right to protection for the hours that they work, for hourly pay rates, time off and holidays. In Committee, we heard many examples of what happens when there is no protection when employment is transferred from a local authority to a new employer—weeks have been cut from annual holidays and there have been cuts of up to 50 per cent. in hourly rates of pay and cuts in pension entitlement. In many instances, workers have been transferred out of the local authority pension scheme into a new scheme, with no rights. While they work for the new employer they will have pension rights only if they can pay for a private pension plan. In reality, the right to purchase a private plan does not exist for many low-paid workers.

Compulsory competitive tendering has dragged down local authority workers' conditions of employment and has denied them rights that they previously enjoyed when they worked for the authority.

Given that that is the Government's history, what guarantee do we have that they will not use this redistribution to attempt to undermine the rights of masses of workers in local government? Members of Parliament who have worked for local authorities, as I did for many years, believe that that is precisely what will happen. The Government will use the local government review as a massive shake-up of the numbers of people employed in local authorities, of how much they are paid, and of their conditions of service.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) is right to say that the proposed staff commissions are important in trying to improve the morale of local authority workers, which is at its lowest, and to reassure them. However, in reality, the Government will not accept the establishment of staff commissions. In the long term, only the return of a Labour Government will help local government workers to maintain their levels of pay and conditions. That is the bottom line.

Given that the Government want the House to approve this legislation, it is important for them to set out precisely their intentions for the transfer of jobs between county councils and unitary authorities, or from former county borough areas to new unitary authorities in the non-metropolitan areas. Will the Government give clear guidelines on the protection of salaries, conditions of employment and pensions?

[Mr. McCartney]

In Committee, I twice mentioned pensions and Government policy on them. The response from the Minister was unsympathetic, to say the least. If his pension rights were involved, he would not be so unsympathetic. Our pensions are protected. The Government have failed lamentably to protect the pension rights of tens of thousands of local authority workers. This review will affect not merely tens of thousands but hundreds of thousands of local government workers. Will the Minister give a clear sign that the huge reserves in local authority pension schemes will be maintained? Will employees have an absolute right in law to remain in schemes, or, if they have to be wound down because the local authority unit of organisation is removed, will those rights be transferred into a new scheme so that irrespective of whom the employee works for after the decision to amalgamate or to eradicate their previous employer, at vesting day when the new authority takes over, their pension rights will be maintained? That would mean that people who had worked for a local authority for 25 years and had paid into the pension scheme would be able to take their contributions with them to the new employer. It is vital that we are given a clear understanding that that will be the case.

What will be the Government's policy on the protection of salaries? I do not argue that people should maintain the same salaries throughout their working lives. I accept that salaries may go up or down. I am at a period in my career when my salary is increasing considerably. I do not suggest that local government workers should be absolutely cushioned, but it would be wholly wrong both in principle and in practice if, by virtue of a change in local government boundaries and therefore a change of employer, a worker found himself substantially worse off overnight, having been transferred to a job with a lower salary. That means a salary reduction, not merely for the worker but for the family unit, with all the consequences. Will there be rules and regulations to protect salaries? They should be protected at least for a few years so that there is no cut-off point and local authority workers are not forced to transfer into new employment and to accept a major cut in their salary.

I hope that the Minister can give us some satisfactory replies. If he can, some local government workers may feel more reassured than they do at present.

Mr. Key: I must start by saying something which I think will be deeply unpopular on the Opposition Benches. I have great faith in local government. I have a high respect for local government staff, whether senior officers or people who have worked for years and often decades in lowly positions to make local authority services work. Far from local authorities suffering the death of a thousand cuts, which I suspect Opposition Members would like us to believe in, local government has a bright future. I envisage local government having an enhanced status, the like of which has not been seen this side of 1945. As a result of measures that have been difficult and unpopular in local government—including the operation of compulsory competitive tendering, changing local authorities to an enabling role, and crucial areas of change such as the city challenge—in the future there will be more responsibility for officers and staff at all levels. They will have more influence over the communities we all seek to serve and there will be more status for people who work in local authorities. That is how I see the future.

Mr. O'Brien: While the Minister is completing his vision of the future for people employed in local government, will he assure us that he will not countenance the discrimination that currently takes place? Officers in local government suffer political discrimination, but officers who work for private-sector organisations or consultancies, which will take over the duties and management of local authority services, will not be politically disfranchised. If the Minister believes in local government, will he remove such discrimination?

Mr. Key: It is always a pleasure to spar with the hon. Gentleman and I give him the same answer that I gave in Committee. We are talking about two entirely different types of provision of services. There can be no question of private-sector contractors being subject to the same political constraints. As I tried to demonstrate in Committee—and the Committee agreed with me—local government officers give policy advice to elected politicians; therefore, they operate under a completely different set of circumstances.

Mr. McCartney *rose*——

Mr. Key: I do not wish to give way to the hon. Gentleman, but if I do not I know that the debate will begin to break up.

8 pm

Mr. McCartney: The Minister is so kind. Will the Minister tell us about the position of a private solicitor who is employed when compulsory competitive tendering occurs and is asked to give policy advice on legal matters? He would be allowed to stand in an election for whatever party he wished. However, a local government solicitor who works for the same or another authority, but does not give such advice, is prevented from even putting up a poster at election time.

Mr. Key: The private-sector solicitor would be operating under a specific contract, for a specific job and for a specific period. The local government officer, who has qualified to be a solicitor, is in a completely different position.

I wish to reply to the points raised by the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney). I accept that, perhaps, one of the things that has been lacking in local government has been the opportunity to pursue a proper career. I have seen that for myself. In the first weeks of becoming a Minister in the Department of the Environment when I was responsible for housing, I was shocked to discover the lack of training available for people in housing management. The Government are now dealing with that problem. Motivation is a crucial factor. If staff do not have motivation because they do not see a career ahead, they will inevitably and understandably not give of their best.

In order to dispel another myth, it is important to recognise that the number of staff employed by local authorities is almost the same now as it was 10 years ago. The number of local authority personnel has not massively withered away. The figures for local authorities bear that out. Pensions and salaries will be dealt with by clause 26 (5)(b).

The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) made a typically telling comment. He is right that local government officers and their families form part of the community. Their children go to school with our children, and so on. I recognise that they are part of the fabric of the community which they serve, in the same way that the hon. Gentleman and I are members of the community that we represent.

It is true that local government officials have experienced considerable pressure in the past decade. I recognise that, but that is a good thing. As a result of what has happened over the past 10 years, we have a vigorous local government service that has a quite different standing in the eyes of the people who pay for and receive the services that it provides. I pay tribute to local government staff who have responded robustly and with vitality over the past 10 years. That is why I was so robust in my opening remarks. I care about local government staff and acknowledge their fears, but local government has a great future.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) said that we should send out a message of support, concern and understanding. I unreservedly join him in that. Over the years we have not heard Conservative Ministers castigating local authority employees. We may have been rude about local councillors because they direct and make the policy that their officers carry out. I note what the hon. Gentleman said about East Sussex county council and I shall consider that. He said that the work force tend to be the pawns and I recognise his concern. I listened to the comments that the hon. Gentleman relayed to us from the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) on the problems of Tweeddale district council. He said that his right hon. Friend was worried about interference in local government. I ask him to convey to his right hon. Friend my belief in the future of local government and how I think that it has a strong future with a high status in our community.

I believe that the relationship between central Government officials and local government officers is perhaps better than we have any right to deserve. They work closely together. We at the Department of the Environment are anxious that such co-operation should be improved still further. We have a programme of secondment between the Department and local authorities which is valuable, and chief officers of local authorities meet permanent secretaries and other senior officials on a regular basis.

In common with the hon. Member for Eastbourne, I am concerned about what he described as profligate lobbying about the future of local government. I have had something to say about that in the past. I do not believe that glossy publications and brochures should be produced by different councils. They have a right, of course, to consult their local people and to explain what is going on, but I suspect that the local government commission will not be swayed by glossy brochures and flashy publicity.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said that the greatest asset a service has is the people who work for it and I say "Hear, hear" to that.

Mr. Blunkett: Hear, hear.

Mr. Key: We are in stereo.

We mean to restore commitment to and faith in the public services, but our vision is fundamentally different from the hon. Gentleman's provider vision. I believe that there is a desire to serve among local government staff and officers at all levels. The status of local authorities is different from that perceived many years ago when the hon. Gentleman and I were children. Then, there was a somewhat cosy atmosphere in local government that did not necessarily mean that the best standards were always adhered to.

The hon. Member for Brightside also said that a prerequisite of any good service was the retention of high-quality staff. That is true, but my approach is slightly different from that of the hon. Gentleman. I want exchanges to take place between the private and public sectors. I do not want to lock local government officers to their particular jobs. It is entirely healthy that there should be such exchanges. Sometimes people leave local government service to work in the private sector. Sometimes they go back to local government work when they discover that the bright lights of London and the London weighting that went with them were not what they should be. We in central Government have also learnt that lesson, because more of our jobs are being moved from London to the country.

The hon. Member for Brightside also spoke about career development and the importance of in-service management and training, with which I agree. However, we have a long way to go. I believe that local authorities should be examples of the very best management practice. It has always struck me as astonishing that anyone should be prepared to accept that what is good for the best private-sector companies, such as ICI, which has been mentioned today, should not be equally applicable to local government. I want local government to bear fine testimony to best management practice.

We already have a high standard of management in local authorities and that standard is constantly improving. That is one reason why there is such a strong exchange programme between some local authorities and the emerging democracies of eastern Europe. That is why their local government Ministers come here to discuss with us the problems that we face and the programmes for change that we are instituting.

I hope that I can demonstrate that there is no wide gulf between us on the issue of staff commissions—it is a matter of different emphasis. Any such commission would have three duties. First, it would be required to consider the arrangements for the recruitment or transfer of staff by the relevant authorities affected by the orders under part II of the Bill. Secondly, it would have to consider any staffing issue referred to it by the Secretary of State. Thirdly, it would advise the Secretary of State on the steps necessary to safeguard the interests of the staff.

The clause also provides for the Secretary of State to issue directions to any relevant authority affected by an order under that part of the measure about the implementation of any advice given by a staff commission. There is a separate provision, to which I have referred, in clause 26(5)(b) which would allow the Secretary of State to make orders for the transfer of staff, compensation for loss of office, pensions and other staffing matters.

I do not doubt that staff commissions have been important in the past. We shall not hesitate to establish one or more should that prove necessary. But the practice in the past has been for a major reorganisation to be put

[Mr. Key]

into effect on a single day—what has often been referred to as the big bang approach. We have learned from the lessons of 1972, to which the hon. Member for Brightside referred. That single vesting day inevitably caused considerable upheaval, and an important task of the staff commission was to try to lessen the impact on the interests of the staff.

On this occasion it is different. The local government commission will review local government in England on an area-by-area basis. We do not know what the commission's recommendations will be, nor how extensive a reorganisation of local government will eventually result from the review in each area. So where the Secretary of State decides to make orders following recommendations from the commission, the changes will be implemented in stages.

I accept that there will be a significant period of uncertainty for staff. Whereas some people have maintained that the single vesting day led to considerable upheaval and uncertainty, the opposite case is now being made out—that a piecemeal approach would lead to even greater uncertainty. As I said in Committee, I recall well —I was a teacher of economics—what happened in 1972.

Mr. Alan Amos (Hexham): Hear, hear.

Mr. Key: I am pleased to hear my hon. Friend agreeing with me. I recall that my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) came on teaching practice and took over my sixth form for a happy term. The A-level students benefited enormously from that experience. I was grateful to him at the time for taking a load off my shoulders for a term. Now he is doing the same as he sits on the Bench behind me.

The area-by-area approach that the Government are proposing should reduce the amount of uncertainty that the staff will have to put up with. We believe that the process of review of the whole country will take at least five years. The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone said he recognised that it was unlikely that we would seek a definite end date for the process. I believe that it will be at least five years. If there were a big bang approach, we would have to specify that after two, three, five or however many years there would be a single changeover.

The need for a staff commission will depend on the scale of the changes proposed in any one area. In some areas, the changes are likely to be minor, and I believe that it would be unnecessary to set up a staff commission to deal with relatively minor problems which local authorities are perfectly competent to cope with among themselves. But we accept that where there are major structural changes, we may need to establish one or more staff commissions.

I have given an assurance that we will establish a staff commission where necessary. I have explained that we take on board the need to keep in mind issues of pensions, salaries and so on. As proof of my good faith, I can report to the House that I had a good discussion with NALGO last week. The union asked to see me about the matter and I was happy to oblige. I appreciate that it is not affiliated to the Labour party—I shall not fall into the trap of saying otherwise—even though NALGO may be spending a lot of money promoting the interests of my political opponents.

I had a good meeting with a number of NALGO officials, including Alison Mitchell, the deputy national officer in the local government section, and I asked whether the union would help us by submitting some proposals on how a staff commission should work. It has agreed to do so. We hope that proposals will come out of discussions between the local government associations and local government unions, based on our legislation. I hope we can agree that there is not a wide gulf between us and that we recognise the problems. I hope that I have managed to lay to rest once and for all the unwarranted belief that in some way we do not see anything other than a bright future for local government.

8.15 pm

Mr. Blunkett: There is nothing between us, except whether we believe a word of what the Minister has been saying.

Mr. Key: That is unworthy of the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Blunkett: Is it? I remind hon. Members that the Minister said that he had an undying commitment to local government, which he claimed had a brighter future than at any time since 1945. He said that far from detracting from and constraining local government—by capping, regulating or in some cases diverting parts of it to the private sector—the Government were fully in favour of local government. He reminded me of the man who said that he liked little lambs and their fleece, and above all he liked eating them. I thought of the Minister in that light when he spoke about how much he liked local government. He was almost drooling as he said it, as though holding a cleaver in one hand and a microwave in the other.

The truth is that whether there is a piecemeal or comprehensive approach to reorganisation, if there is good staff at any level, we must ensure that they are transferred in a reasonable fashion. But if unitary district authorities are established and the county in that area is abolished, there is a danger that the highest quality staff at the county level in some of the most key services will find themselves excluded. That would be tremendously detrimental to local government. Indeed, the whole issue of transferring politicians will prove a major problem if we wish to ensure quality of service and the highest possible functioning of local government.

For those reasons, we regard the issue as important enough to press to a Division. I look the Minister in the eye as he smiles unwaveringly and assures me that local government has an unending future under his knife.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 181, Noes 247.

Division No. 95] **[8.17 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*	Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Allen, Graham	Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Alton, David	Benton, Joseph
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Bermingham, Gerald
Armstrong, Hilary	Bidwell, Sydney
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Blunkett, David
Ashton, Joe	Boyes, Roland
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Bradley, Keith
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*	Bray, Dr Jeremy
Barron, Kevin	Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Battle, John	Caborn, Richard
Beckett, Margaret	Callaghan, Jim
Bell, Stuart	Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Bellotti, David	Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*

Canavan, Dennis
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terence
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Jack Thompson.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard

Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 6

PUBLIC INFORMATION

'(1) This section shall have effect for the purposes of securing proper public information about and involvement in the procedure established under Part II of this Act.

(2) Before making any order under section 17 (1) below, the Secretary of State shall by a date not later than two months before the laying of any such order—

(a) publish any relevant recommendation of the Commission;

(b) ensure that persons interested in the review are enabled to make comments on the relevant recommendations; and

(c) publish a statement of his response to the recommendations of the Commission.'.—*[Mr. O'Brien.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. O'Brien: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Due to lack of time, we have not moved new clause 1. New clause 6 is a significant and important amendment to clause 17. It is significant that so far in this debate we have discussed only part II of the Bill. The new clause will ensure that a proper public information exercise takes place and that people interested in the legislation will be allowed information about and involvement in any procedure established under part II of the Bill.

The new clause states:

"Before making any order under section 17 (1) below, the Secretary of State shall by a date not later than two months before the laying of any such order—

(a) publish any relevant recommendations of the Commission".

That means that the people who could be affected by the commission's recommendations should be made fully aware of any effects that the recommendations may have.

8.30 pm

If we are to be fully democratic in our approach to the reorganisation of local government, everyone involved must have the right to know about the changes. They are entitled to make comments and recommendations. The Secretary of State should ensure that people interested in the review are able to comment on the recommendations that affect them. The Secretary of State should also publish a statement of his response to the commission's recommendations. There must be a full public relations exercise so that the commission's recommendations are made fully available.

We have outlined in detail, in Committee and to some extent in the House today, how the public could be involved in the commission's recommendations. They could be involved in questions of boundaries, local representation, housing or other services. We therefore believe that those people should have the opportunity to comment on the report. When the Secretary of State considers the representations and publishes his report, that should also be made available to those involved.

That policy should apply not only to local government customers, but to people involved in local government. If we are to be fair and honest with all the people who could be involved, ensuring that information is made available to them is of paramount importance. If there is any reason why the public should not be informed of the commission's work and decisions, and the recommendations of the Secretary of State, the Minister should spell that out to the House. If there is no reason why people should not be advised or have the opportunity to make observations and comments on the response of the Secretary of State, the new clause should be accepted today.

We have tabled the new clause as we consider that it is constructive and will strengthen the Bill. Although we do not agree with many aspects of the Bill, we believe that it should be strengthened in this way. It is against that backcloth that I commend the new clause for consideration by the House, and ask the House to accept it.

Mr. Portillo: I have no particular disagreement with the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) about the desirability of publicity being given to the recommendations made by the local government commission, but I think that the new clause is unnecessary. He should consider clause 15 of the Bill.

Clause 15(1) provides that people who may be interested in the review should be informed of the review's existence. Clause 15(2) provides that steps should be taken to inform people who have an interest of the fact that the commission is conducting a review and the period in which representations may be made. Clause 15(3) states that the

local government commission is bound to take into account any representations, to prepare draft recommendations and to deposit those

"recommendations at the principal office of any principal council appearing to that Commission to be likely to be affected by them; and take into consideration any representations made to that Commission".

Under clause 15(4) the local government commission is obliged to submit to the Secretary of State a report and to

"take such steps as it considers sufficient to secure that persons who may be interested in the recommendations are informed of them."

Clause 15(5) contains a requirement that copies of any draft recommendations should be

"deposited at the principal office of a principal council"

and should be kept available for inspection so that representations in respect of them can be made. Clause 15(7) states that

"The Secretary of State may give directions as to the exercise by the Local Government Commission of any functions under"

clause 15.

Therefore, the process that we foresee is that the commission will start a review with publicity and consultation to take into account the representations received in drawing up draft recommendations. The public should be consulted on the draft recommendations and account should be taken of those representations when preparing the final recommendations. The final representations should be submitted to the Secretary of State and there should be a further opportunity for the public to comment, this time to the Secretary of State, before he makes an order and brings it to Parliament to give effect to the commission's recommendations.

Therefore, there are ample opportunities for publicity to be given to the commission's work and to the report laid before the Secretary of State, and for representations to be made to the Secretary of State himself.

We intend to issue procedural guidance to organisations that could be consulted at each stage, as well as a general requirement that the commission should make the existence of the review made known widely and should consider all the views that come forward, whether solicited or not.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): When ensuring that people have access to information, will the Minister take into account people with specific difficulties such as the blind and the deaf? Will he oblige local authorities to make sure that people with disabilities have access to the information to which, as citizens, they are entitled?

Mr. Portillo: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman followed our deliberations in Committee carefully, when we discussed an amendment to that effect. I hope that the local government commission will make information available on request in the form described by the hon. Gentleman. I am reluctant to make it an obligation on the local government commission that it should automatically produce material, not least because the various forms in which it may be published are different for people with different disabilities, but I shall ask the local government commission to bear in mind the needs of people who are partially sighted or blind, and people with other disabilities or language difficulties who might otherwise be denied access to the important information.

I must correct myself: our debate in Committee was not on the local government commission, but on a different part of the Bill. However, it was related to the same subject and my response is generally the same. I think that the information should be considered carefully by the local government commission if a request is made. It would not be right to demand of the local government commission that it automatically produces its recommendations in various forms.

The guidance that the Government will issue will also stress the importance of gauging the views of people living in the district, and others who might be affected, and will set out ways of achieving that.

I have no particular disagreement with the view of the hon. Member for Normanton that it is important at every stage to publicise recommendations and that people's views should be taken into account. There will, of course, be bodies that it will be considered right for the commission to consult; it will also be considered right for it to take into account representations made by anyone, regardless of whether that person has been invited to make representations.

Now that I have explained to the hon. Gentleman how clause 15 will operate, and given him an indication of the way in which I intend the procedural guidance to be drafted, I hope that he will see fit to withdraw the motion.

Mr. O'Brien: Clearly, as the Minister says, there is not much to divide us on the issue. However, clause 15 does not deal with the points that are giving rise to concern —hence new clause 6. Under clause 15,

"the Local Government Commission shall ... take into consideration any representations made to it within the period mentioned in subsection (1)(c) or (2)(c) above ... draft recommendations and take such steps as it considers sufficient to secure that persons who may be interested in the recommendations are informed of them and of the period within which recommendations with respect to them may be made".

We are saying that, in the interests of greater public awareness, the recommendations should be published and made public—that they should be deposited in the library or in some other public office.

We ask not only for the commission's recommendations to be made available to those involved and to the wider public, but for the Secretary of State's response to those recommendations to be publicised. Clause 15 makes no such provision. Subsection (7) provides:

"The Secretary of State may give directions as to the exercise by the Local Government Commission of any functions under this section; and such directions may require that Commission to have regard to any guidance given by the Secretary of State as respects matters to be taken into account."

We do not think that that is sufficient assurance that the information will be made available. We want firmer provisions to be included in the Bill, and we are disappointed to learn that the Government cannot accept our proposal.

The issue should be given further consideration. People need to be fully informed of both the commission's decisions and the Secretary of State's response. Although, as I have said, our positions do not differ greatly, I ask the Minister to think carefully about the matter.

Mr. Portillo: Let me make two points. First, I assure the hon. Gentleman that—as with local government boundary decisions now—there will always be a period after the Secretary of State receives a report during which he can

[Mr. Portillo]

receive public comments that may be submitted to him. The second, obvious point is that the Secretary of State must bring an order to Parliament in regard to structural changes; such orders will be subject to affirmative resolution. The final decision must be taken in Parliament.

Mr. O'Brien: That demonstrates again that there is not a great deal between our thinking and that of the Minister. Both sides accept the importance of the availability of public information about any recommendation from the commission, and about the Secretary of State's response. We merely ask for a public information exercise to be undertaken, both in the House and outside. If the Minister gives further consideration to the principles and the merits of the new clause, I am sure that he could respond more fully.

Although I do not intend to press the motion to a Division, I feel that we should be able to return to the new clause if necessary.

Question put and negatived.

New clause 10

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN DELIVERY OF LOCAL SERVICES

'.—(1) The Audit Commission and the Scottish Accounts Commission shall, before issuing directions under this Part, have regard to the need for involving the public in setting and monitoring standards of performance.

(2) The Secretary of State, in making any order under this Part relating to competitive tendering, shall ensure that any directions contained in the Order shall take into account the importance of involving the public in any decision making.'. *—[Mr. Bellotti.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

8.45 pm

Mr. Bellotti: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause goes to the crux of local service provision. It is really a question of whether we believe that central Government should direct local services, or whether we should now take the opportunity of putting local people—the local electorate—back in charge of those services.

In a sense, this is about whether the people should be the final arbiter in regard to how services are delivered and monitored. In our view, it is not for a commission or for the Secretary of State to dictate to local authorities how their services should be delivered. Of course, both the commission and the Secretary of State will have important roles in providing advice, information and guidelines on good practice, but neither should be the final arbiter.

The commission could have a role in encouraging the development of a new form of local government structure. The Secretary of State can encourage local authorities to go for competitive tendering to obtain quality at an affordable cost. There are advantages, however, in making the people the final arbiter again—in ensuring that the public not only understand the services that are provided, but are consulted fully about their quality.

Many local authorities already test public opinion about the delivery of services in their area. Richmond council, for example, regularly runs surveys to determine whether local people consider the quality of service important. Recently, Tower Hamlets council conducted a referendum on what the local poll tax level should be. It received a 28 per cent. return of questionnaires, and 45 per cent. of respondents opted for the highest of four offered poll tax levels—which showed, I think, that local people wanted a high-quality service and were prepared to pay for it, but it also showed that they were prepared to enter into a dialogue with the local authority about what they thought of the services provided. I might add that the survey was carried out at mininum cost and has provided the council with useful information.

The choice is this: should there be central guidelines and blueprints, or should local people be left to enjoy services and then comment on them in a way which could lead to improvements? The question whether the Secretary of State should have power to dictate to councils about compulsory competitive tendering is at the core of the current arrangements, but I propose to change that by putting the people back in power. If a local authority and the public are satisfied with the cost and quality of an in-house service, why should the local authority be forced to put that service out to the private sector? If local people are happy and are prepared to pay, central Government should not interfere.

It is also important that, if a tender is undertaken, some customer reaction is obtained. After all, anyone can put a service out to tender at the lowest possible cost, but no one may be pleased with the way in which the service is delivered. According to recent statistics, 28 per cent. of people in the Dorset county council area are unhappy with the services delivered by that council. If more than one in four people who live in the Dorset county council area are unhappy with the services delivered, it says something about those services. Changes ought to be made.

The new clause is about turning the Bill into one which puts local people back in charge. I hope that I have said enough to enable the Minister to tell me why he wants central Government to be put in the driving seat and why he does not intend to allow local people to take decisions which affect their local communities.

Mr. Portillo: I shall try to emulate the commendable brevity of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti). However, the way that he has drafted new clause 10 shows that he has misunderstood the Government's intentions. The first part of it calls upon the Audit Commission and the Scottish Accounts Commission to have regard to the need, before issuing directions, to involve the public in setting and monitoring standards of performance. However, we do not propose that the Audit Commission and the Scottish Accounts Commission shall set standards. What we are asking them to do is to provide objective measurements by which all local authorities can measure the standards that they have set and the service that they are providing to the electors.

It is absolutely central to our proposals that the public will be able to make judgments as to whether they are satisfied with the services that their local authorities are providing for them. Their local authorities will account to them for the standards of service that they are delivering, measured objectively. They will use measurements that are common to all other local authorities. It will be possible, therefore, for people to make comparisons between what the local authority promised and what it has delivered, and also between what one local authority delivers and what another local authority delivers. It will all be measured in

exactly the same terms. The first part of new clause 10 shows that the hon. Gentleman has misunderstood our intentions. What we intend puts the public very much in the driving seat. It provides the public with the information, objectively derived, that they need in order to be able to judge their council.

The second part of the proposal in new clause 10 once again shows that the hon. Gentleman has misunderstood the position. In setting out the specification for anything that is to be the subject of competitive tendering, it is for the local authority to determine for itself the standard at which it wishes its services to be delivered. The local authority should be concerned if subsequently it finds that people are not satisfied with the services delivered. That could only be for one of two reasons: either the specification was wrong, in terms of what local people expected, or the tenderer had under-performed against the specification. If the tenderer has under-performed against the specification, because he is working under contract to the local authority it has redress against the contractor —a redress that it would not normally have against a directly employed labour force operating outside the competitive tendering process.

I have no quarrel with the hon. Gentleman that local people should be able democratically to deliver their judgment about the standard of service that the local authority delivers, whether or not it be a service for which there has been competitive tendering. However, local authorities will have a greater opportunity both to set the specification and to call a contractor to book where the compulsory competitive tendering process has been gone through than would otherwise be the case.

Mr. Bellotti: We debated this subject fairly fully in Committee, when I put forward a range of opportunities by means of which local authorities could consult people and identify customer care. Having listened to the Minister's reply, I do not think that he has moved any further forward since the Committee debate. It is a little late to suggest that a local authority will have redress if a contract is not fulfilled. At the point of redress, local people will have lost the service that they were supposedly going to get. It will be a little late for the local authority to reinstate services that the tenderer failed to deliver.

Before a local authority considers awarding another contract to a private tenderer who was awarded a contract for which there ought to be redress and under which the contract has not been delivered to the standard required, it ought to think carefully about what it is doing. The contractor will have clearly demonstrated that he is unable to deliver a service to a certain level of quality. That argument was put forward throughout the whole of the Committee proceedings. It was clear there that cost is the Government's first concern and that quality comes second. In my view, quality is as important as cost. I would not consider awarding anybody a contract if that person had not fulfilled a previous contract to the necessary level of quality.

For those reasons, it appears that the Minister has not moved any further forward since Committee. I believe that the Government are not putting people and quality of service first but are following a cost-led policy. I therefore intend to press the new clause to a Division.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 119, Noes 241.

Division No. 95] **[8.56 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Margaret
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cryer, Bob
Darling, Alistair
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Patchett, Terry
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rooney, Terence
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Winnick, David
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. James Wallace.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*

Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Irvine Patnick.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 16

CHARTER TRUSTEES

'.— (1) Where an order under section 17 above makes provision respecting the constitution of an area for which a body of charter trustees acts, a body of charter trustees may resolve that the area for which such charter trustees act shall be constituted a parish and thereupon those district councillors who are such charter trustees shall become the councillors of the parish so constituted and such councillors shall hold office until the next ordinary election of parish councillors pursuant to the 1972 Act.

(2) Upon the constitution of a parish as provided in this section the body corporate of charter trustees shall cease to exist and thereupon all of the powers, functions and traditions of the former body of charter trustees shall vest in and be discharged by the council of the new parish hereby constituted which shall be styled a town council or a city council (as the case may be).'.—*[Mr. Anthony Coombs.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may consider the following amendments:

No. 3, in clause 17, page 17, line 19, leave out from 'make' to end of line 21 and insert

'provision for the area for which a body of charter trustees acts to be constituted as a parish under the terms of section (*Charter trustees*) below'.

No. 4, in page 17, line 21, at end add

'after consulting such representatives of charter trustees as he thinks fit'.

Mr. Coombs: This gives me the opportunity to extol the virtues of charter trustees with which the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), is familiar as the charter trustees of, I think, New Sarum are in his constituency, and his colleagues the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, our hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) also has charter trustees in his constituency. The matter has been brought to my attention

not only by the charter trustees in Kidderminster but by the Association of Charter Trustees and Urban Parish Councils.

Charter trustees were set up under the Local Government Act 1972 and the Charter Trustees Order of 20 February 1974 to allow existing communities to retain their ancient identity and heritage when they had generally been amalgamated into larger boroughs or district councils as a result of reorganisation. Therefore, it is no small wonder that it is ancient towns such as Salisbury, Banbury, Leamington Spa and Kidderminster which retain their charter trustees. There are about 23 such towns, 21 of which are members of the Association of Charter Trustees and Urban Parish Councils.

It must be emphasised that the charter trustees' functions are primarily ceremonial. They act as a focus of civic identity for the people of the district, as in Kidderminster, and they have no specific executive powers. However, as clause 13(5)(a) of the Bill states that in its considerations the local government commission should

"reflect the identities and interests of local communities",

I should have thought that that was in line with the purpose of charter trustees in view of their local and historic traditions.

Charter trustees are important in my constituency. Although Wyre Forest district council may be the executive body for local government Acts and for the majority of services for which district councils are responsible, it does not inspire much loyalty among the local population. If one were to ask the vast majority of people in my constituency where Wyre Forest was, they would refer to Kidderminster, Stourport and Bewdley. Given the fact that Stourport and Bewdley have ancient town councils whereas Kidderminster has charter trustees, the people of Kidderminster are understandably jealous about retaining their charter trustees under any future local government reorganisation. Although charter trustees may sound anachronistic and may not be functional as executives, they are important as a focus of loyalty.

The charter trustees are concerned because, although subsections (3) and (4) of clause 14 give wide powers to the Secretary of State and to the local government commission when considering changes in local government, they mention parishes as the most local denominator of local government and do not mention charter trustees. Charter trustees are mentioned only in clause 17(5) where, almost as an afterthought, as the charter trustees believe, they are referred to when the Bill describes the powers that the Secretary of State can exercise on receiving recommendations from the local government commission.

My fear is that because the local government commission does not have a specific remit to consider charter trustees when it considers the structure of local government, their case may go by default. The Secretary of State may act accordingly when he puts the commission's recommendations into operation.

The new clause gives charter trustees the right to change themselves into parish councils with all the responsibilities and opportunities for direct election which that would involve. That would ensure that they would be considered by the local government commission and that their future would, therefore, be assured. I hope that the Minister can give me some reassurance about the importance that the local government commission will give charter trustees when it considers these important matters.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): I detain the House briefly to support my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) and to refer to a matter that is obviously dear to the hearts of charter trustees and to my own heart. The matter is the subject of amendment No. 1 which we will not have a chance to debate, although I was the first hon. Member to table an amendment to the Bill on Report.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister shares my concern about archives. There can be nothing more important to charter trustees than the proper preservation of their archives and records. One point that has given many of us cause——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The matter does not arise under the new clause. There is a later amendment, as the hon. Gentleman knows. We should not seek to pre-empt that debate now.

Mr. Cormack: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I suggest that what I am saying is entirely relevant to the——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows better than to question my ruling. My ruling is correct. We do not discuss archives when debating new clause 16.

Mr. Key: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre for raising the subject and to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) to whom I will write. I will conclude the matter in that way, which will be more acceptable to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre——

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Wyre Forest.

Mr. Key: I beg the pardon of my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs).

I remember well that when I had been in the House for only about a year my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison) started on a path that led him to introduce the Charter Trustees Bill, which was enacted in 1985. I was a supporter on that occasion and I believe that my hon. Friend did us all a great service.

My charter trustees go back a long way. Charter trustees are an important part of the heritage of any of our ancient cities.

The mayor of New Sarum, currently Mrs. Gloria Tudhope, is a figure of great importance in the life of the community, as is the mayor of any city, such as Kidderminster or elsewhere. Because we were concerned that mayors and charter trustees might not continue into succeeding centuries, the Charter Trustees Act 1985 was passed. We are all grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes for that.

9.15 pm

I hope that I can put the mind of my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest at rest. Under clause 17, where charter trustees were constituted under the Local Government Act 1972 for an area which is altered under this clause, the Secretary of State may make such provision with respect to those trustees as he thinks appropriate.

Amendment No. 4, which would require the Secretary of State to consult representatives of charter trustees before making such provisions, is not necessary. There will be plenty of opportunity for local representatives of charter trustees to make representations to the local government commission when it comes to review their area. We should expect the commission to take account of those views in drawing up its recommendations to the Secretary of State about what should happen in each area.

Amendment No. 3 would remove the Secretary of State's discretion under clause 17 to make provision, as he sees appropriate, for charter trustees and would permit him only to create a parish for these areas under the terms of new clause 16. His discretion under the Bill as drafted is wide enough to cover the creation of parishes for these areas, but we have no reason to believe at this stage that this will necessarily be the solution to suit local circumstances everywhere. There will be plenty of opportunity for local people to make their views known to the commission about this issue. I assure my hon. Friend that I do not wish to see charter trustees disappear from our heritage.

I do not want to start ruling options out at this stage. It is important to leave that discretion in. I fear that my hon. Friend's amendments would have the reverse effect. The principle is there. We want to ensure that charter trustees continue to exist, just as we want to maintain the other functions of local authorities, such as the preservation of archives.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: The Minister has said that he wishes to see charter trustees prosper. Given what we have on the record, I hope that the local government commission, although not obliged to do so under clause 14, will take into consideration representations made by people who are charter trustees or who speak on their behalf.

I am satisfied with what the Minister said. He made my case for me to a certain extent when he called my constituency Wyre rather than Wyre Forest. Although constituencies like Banbury, Leamington Spa and Dover do not have anonymity, Wyre Forest enjoys anonymity not only in the House but also, sadly, in Wyre Forest. I accept the assurance which the Minister has given. As a result, I hope that charter trustees can gain parish status under local government reorganisation and that they will prosper.

It is a pity that we could not discuss the matter of archives because they are integral to the function of charter trustees——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not question my ruling either.

Mr. Coombs: I hope that they will prosper as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman seek the leave of the House to withdraw the new clause?

Mr. Coombs: No.

Question put and negatived.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand that new clause 19 is not being moved. We now come to new clause 20.

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I wish to move amendment No. 2, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If new clause 19 is not moved, the hon. Gentleman will have to wait until we reach that amendment, which refers to a later part of the Bill. We cannot discuss it now.

New clause 20

CRITERIA FOR A NEW TENDERING REGIME (No. 2)

'.—(1) This section has effect for the purposes of specifying criteria which shall be fulfilled before the introduction of any new regime of compulsory competitive tendering under the provisions of this Act.

(2) No order shall be made under section 8 below unless the Secretary of State is satisfied on reasonable grounds that the following criteria will be fulfilled by any such order—

(a) that the tendering procedures introduced under any such order are consistent with any Directive of the European Community and that no liability will arise in respect of any local authority under any such directive as a result of any difference between the provisions; and

(b) that the quality of local authority services to which any such order applies will be improved as a result of the order, and that any procedure to be established enables local authorities to balance considerations of quality and cost in the most effective and efficient manner.'—*[Mr. O'Brien].*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. O'Brien: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Labour Members consider part I of the Bill to be as important as part II, as we showed in Committee when we expressed our deep concern about compulsory competitive tendering and its extension by the Bill. We wish to draw attention now to the fact that there are other factors that the House should bear in mind when considering the extension of CCT.

The new criteria for tendering are worthy of further consideration. The new clause states:

"This section has effect for the purpose of specifying criteria which shall be fulfilled before the introduction of any new regime of compulsory competitive tendering under the provisions of this Act."

It is intended to give safeguards to local authorities in connection with the new CCT clauses. It continues:

"(2) No order shall be made under section 8 below unless the Secretary of State is satisfied on reasonable grounds that the following criteria will be fulfilled by any such order—

(a) that the tendering procedures introduced under any such order are consistent with any Directive of the European Community and that no liability will arise in respect of any local authority under any such directive as a result of any difference between the provisions; and

(b) that the quality of local authority services to which any such order applies will be improved as a result of the order, and that any procedure to be established enables local authorities to balance considerations of quality and cost in the most effective and efficient manner."

The difference between the proposal that we put forward in Committee and the present proposal is that the new clause provides that the EC directive can influence the way in which tendering arrangements and contracts are adhered to under any new procedures, following its introduction later this year.

Clauses 8 to 11 enable the Secretary of State to extend CCT to other council services and to change the existing rules and regulations for CCT. We are fully aware that local authorities are already compelled to invite tenders for

building and maintenance work and for other blue collar services such as school cleaning, school meals, refuse collection, and so on.

The document, "Competing for Quality", is divided into two parts. The first, "A clearer framework for compulsory competitive tendering", deals with the changes to the tendering rules to tighten up procedures and give the Secretary of State additional policing powers. For example, the Government will be able to take quicker and more effective action against local authorities which appear to the Secretary of State not to be complying with the CCT requirements. That is one reason why the Minister should favourably consider the new clause. If the Secretary of State is to receive new policing powers, we must ensure that there are safeguards for local authorities in the tendering procedure as compared with the EC directive.

Also, in regard to "Competing for Quality", the extension of CCT details the Government's plans for further CCT of police support services, for example, the maintenance of vehicles and home-to-school transport. Those issues were referred to in Committee. We also drew attention to our concern about library services and other managerial services such as engineering, architecture, legal services, and so on.

In Committee, when we outlined our concerns about the extension of CCT in respect of managerial services, we requested information on why the Government were so intent on including those services in the powers that they already possess in the 1980 and 1988 Acts. Why did they want to extend compulsory competitive tendering to other managerial services? The Government implied that no service should be provided by the public sector. That is significant. The Minister of State has made it clear that the Government intend to ensure that no services shall be provided by local authorities and that they will enable other organisations to provide them. Why do the Government dislike local government providing services? Perhaps the Minister will explain.

The Government's policies infer that the management of services provided by and on behalf of local government should be provided by people in business whose only purpose is to make money. New clause 20 safeguards the interests of local government and of those who rely on and work in local government, including legal services and the quality and cost of those services covered by the tendering exercise. In addition to safeguarding the interests of people who rely on and work in local government, we want to ensure that the quality and cost of the provision of services are also safeguarded in any tendering exercise. The new clause states

"that the tendering procedures introduced under any such order are consistent with any Directive of the European Community and that no liability will arise in respect of any local authority under any such directive as a result of any difference between the provisions".

Local councils should continue to be able to balance cost and quality considerations in the most effective way when considering tenders, and the quality of local authority services should be improved. That is the basis of the new clause. We want to ensure that cost and quality are balanced in any tendering exercise and that if there is to be compulsory tendering the quality of services is improved.

In Committee my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) outlined what would be the impact of the forthcoming EC directive after it is introduced in July 1993, with particular reference to stage 1, which covers the fitness of the contractor in any tendering procedure. The Minister concentrated on stage 2 of the directive, conveniently overlooking stage 1. In the United Kingdom the provisions of stage 1 of the EC directive should be given consideration. As that was not considered in Committee, we ask the Minister favourably to consider our request today and to respond to our anxiety about what will develop as a result of stage 1 of the directive.

9.30 pm

There is case law in which it is held that public authorities are under an obligation to give effect to Community law even when it conflicts with national law. I draw attention to the fact that it is on record in case law that EC directives which supersede the national law on tendering procedures apply to public authority contracts, as they do to contracts for local government services.

We have seen how the Government act towards local authorities which try to defend the laws of the land. We saw how the Government acted on shop opening hours. Local authorities were trying to uphold the law of the land. When the matter was raised in the House, the Government did not wish to take part or intervene in the matter. I have tabled the new clause because we can see that there will be difficulties in interpreting the obligations of local authorities under Community law when it conflicts with our national laws. We ask the House to accept new clause 20 to safeguard the interests of local government.

We have the impression, and I am sure that people outside also have the impression, that the Government just do not want to know when the pressure is on to help local government. New clause 20 will safeguard the interests of local government and should be included in the Bill. Local authorities must uphold Community law. We would act wrongly if we did not include a safeguard for local authorities in the Bill.

In Committee we defended the decision taken in another place on the future of compulsory competitive tendering because it was in the best interests of the provision of services under the compulsory tendering procedure which applies at present. We consider that it would be in the best interests of local government to extend that decision to the new provisions in the Bill. The Government negated the change made to the Bill in the other place and reintroduced clause 8 to reinstate the double envelope procedure, which was dealt with at length by the Minister of State. It means that the quality threshold is designated and contracts are thereafter awarded to the lowest bidder. So the Secretary of State will set the quality threshold for services which are to be put out to tender. The contract will then be awarded to the lowest bidder. We are concerned about that level of quality threshold. It is not in the best interests of people who rely on local government services for the quality of those services to be set here in Westminster when they will be provided in local authority areas.

The Lords amendment unified cost and quality considerations. In the best interests of providing services and ensuring that they meet customer demand, there should be a unified cost and quality involvement in tendering. That principle should not merely apply to the new legislation but should also extend to tendering which applies to the blue collar worker sections of present legislation.

Another reason why we are asking for safeguards against European Community legislation is the experience of the past. The London borough of Wandsworth accepted tenders from two companies—Initial and Exclusive—which supposedly competed to win contracts to clean housing estates. When they obtained the contracts they immediately merged with two multinationals, BET and the Hawley Group, which controlled 60 per cent. of all local government refuse collection and street cleaning contracts at the time. Experience shows that there have to be built-in safeguards for local government. Another example is the Merseyside development corporation, which was condemned for poor management. The Committee cited the letting of the Liverpool garden festival site to a company which went into liquidation, leaving debts of £5·5 million. The affair reflected badly on MDC's management and the Department of Environment's monitoring. If that can happen under CCT, there must be some safeguards for local authorities when they are involved in such tendering.

In Committee, we referred to the involvement of compulsory competitive tendering in housing. The right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) referred to the need for a cost evaluation of compulsory competitive tendering when considering reorganisation.I suggest to the Minister that Conservative Members have the same concerns that we have about the cost and evaluation of quality in CCT under any tendering system. If it is right for Conservative Members to ask for a cost evaluation in the reorganisation of local government, it is right for us to ask for cost and quality evaluations when awarding contracts under the CCT procedure. The Minister of State referred to "an unbreakable bridge" between Government and people—I think that that was the phrase.

We considered the question of compulsory competitive tendering for housing on more than one occasion in Committee. We asked for the details of the survey that was carried out under the consultation procedures. That survey should have been published in January, but we have not received it. The survey should contain provisions for tenant and co-operative rights under the CCT procedures. We were assured that consideration would be given to tenants and to tenants associations. They are protected by current legislation and I seek the assurance that that protection will continue under CTT procedures. If the existing laws are breached, and the new regulations under the European Community directive do not come into force until after July 1993, I hope that suitable provision will be made for housing. That is important because our communities are short of houses for rent, there is a record number of repossessions and a shortage of housing in rural areas. The CCT and housing management procedures will not solve those problems.

Clause 8 requires the Secretary of State to make orders only if he is satisfied, on reasonable grounds, that the criteria outlined in the clause have been fulfilled and that the orders contained in the clause have been adhered to. That is important when we consider that as a result of the EC directive no liabilities on local authorities will arise from the tendering procedures. Again, our aim is to safeguard the services and the interests of local authorities.

Against that background, it is clear that the new clause will benefit everyone involved. If the Government have any intention of defending and safeguarding the interests of local government, they should accept the new clause.

Mr. Portillo: I honestly do not feel that we have broken much new ground since we debated these matters in Committee.

The hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) asked about the European Community draft directive. As I said in Committee, we are satisfied that there can and will be no conflict between our proposals for the structure of compulsory competitive tendering procedures for professional and technical services and the relevant EC directives. The draft EC directive on public services contracts provides that, subject to the provisions of national law, public authorities can choose between the lowest price tender evaluation procedure or the economically most advantageous tender evaluation procedure.

Under the terms of the EC directive, the double envelope tendering procedure described in our consultation paper is a method of structuring the economically most advantageous tender evaluation procedure. It will allow local authorities in constructing a quality threshold to take account of the type of non-price criteria referred to in the EC directive—quality, technical merit, aesthetic and functional characteristics, technical assistance, service, delivery date, and period of completion.

Subsection (2)*(a)* of the new clause seeks to import into the Bill considerations which are implicit, the expression of which would suggest a conflict where none can exist. In any case, no Government can act contrary to an EC directive that is in force and nor can any local authority.

Mr. Blunkett: There is a conflict between what is meant by "economically advantageous" and the double envelope involving a tendering list followed by lowest cost. The Treasury put out a directive relating to procurement policy and Department of the Environment circular 16/90 interpreted that by saying:

"There are only two alternative criteria: 'lowest price' and 'most economically advantageous tender'. The criterion chosen should normally be the latter as, if the lowest price is chosen, contracting authorities will not necessarily obtain value for money as defined in the Government's consolidated guidelines or public purchasing policy."

That shows that there is a clear choice between what is economically advantageous and the lowest tendering price, reflected in the EC regulation and recommended in the Treasury's works directive.

Mr. Portillo: I see no conflict between what the hon. Gentleman said and what I said. I told him that there were two alternatives—the lowest price tender and the economically most advantageous tender. "Lowest price tender" speaks for itself. "Advantageous tender" evaluation takes into account other factors, beyond price, and I referred to some of them—quality, technical merit, aesthetic and functional characteristics and so on.

Evaluating a bid which first passes a quality threshold and then wins on price is a way of structuring the economically most advantageous tender evaluation procedure. An economically most advantageous tender evaluation procedure must contain within it factors both of quality and of price. What is being proposed in the double envelope technique is that the two should be structured. I shall come shortly to why the Opposition were so keen that those two factors should not be separated.

Mr. Blunkett: The Opposition are keen that the two are combined so that price and quality are weighed in

conjunction with each other, not separated out to make them exclusive in the way that the double envelope would do.

Mr. Portillo: The Opposition are keen to fudge compulsory competitive tendering. Labour Members have always been keen to do that. They are afraid that we shall have two sets of objective criteria, first a threshold of quality which is defined and which tenderers will or will not pass, and a second stage which they must pass on price and provide the lowest price.

The Labour party objects to that because it makes the competition absolutely overt and clear, and it cannot fudge that in favour of the direct supply organisation. On the other hand, if Labour can wrap the two together so that it all becomes a matter of subjectivity about quality —so that it can take not the lowest price but possibly the highest—it can be fudged in favour of the DSO.

The purpose of Labour Members in all of this was apparent throughout the speech of the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien). He talked about safeguarding the interests of local authorities. We are concerned about local government and local authorities, but we are primarily concerned about safeguarding the interests of local people, and providing them with services of the best possible value.

The hon. Member for Normanton said that we were taking new powers to extend compulsory competitive tendering. That is not so. The 1988 Act already provides that we may extend compulsory competitive tendering into new areas. Clause 8 of this Bill is designed to enable us to evaluate separately cost and quality, and that is anathema to Labour, for the reasons I have given.

We did not imply, as the hon. Member for Normanton said, that it was inappropriate for no services to be provided directly by local authorities in the future. Our consultation document makes it clear that, as we move gradually into the area of core services, we acknowledge that local authorities will wish to provide some services directly. That is why we have set out, within that consultation document, a possible technique by which we can judge that part of the core services of a local authority that it would be appropriate for it to continue to provide in house, while ensuring that part of its services is contracted out so that it can be the subject of competition.

The hon. Member for Normanton frequently referred to the need for quality and price to be balanced. That is a euphemism. He simply wishes to confuse the choice so that it will always be possible for local authorities that are so inclined to choose the direct service organisation and, in the process, deny local people the opportunity of the best value for money.

Mr. Blunkett: If that is a Labour party invention, why did the Audit Commission, commenting on "Competing for Quality", say about design services:

"A 'second envelope' decision based solely on price could lead to lesser quality buildings"?

In other words, the Audit Commission considers the double envelope scheme to be a flawed way of proceeding on competitive tendering, even if the Government do not accept that.

Mr. Portillo: Throughout the Committee proceedings I said that I was willing to listen to different ways of structuring that. I said that I did not necessarily stand by a double envelope technique as the be all and end all. But I strongly believe that we need to consider the questions of quality and price separately. We put in the consultation document one way in which that could be done. If there are other ways, I have always said that I would benefit from the advice of professional bodies, and we have been looking forward to receiving that advice and considering it carefully. However, we shall not return to the system that the hon. Gentleman favours, of simply rolling quality and price into one amorphous ball so that any subjective judgment can be made by any local authority and it can award all the contracts to its own direct service organisation.

We are keen on that because we know the game that the Labour party is up to. We know about its dogged opposition to compulsive competitive tendering since it was first introduced. We know that it has fought tooth and nail to ensure that direct service organisations can keep the contracts, whatever the cost to local people. Some Labour politicians over the years have been honest enough to admit what is going on. Keva Coombes, the former leader of Liverpool council, said:

"Frankly, we've put the interests of the providers of the service, the work force, above the interests of the tenants".

He also said:

"'The Council's problems are not down to resources', rather inefficiency. 'It costs four times more to pick up a piece of litter in Liverpool than it does in other areas'".

He then said:

"We are the worst landlord in Liverpool, probably in the country. All the new building has taken place and been run by a central unit and all despite the housing department. It takes genius—voids gone up, rent arrears soared, and the breaking of the law on racial equality".

That is the nightmare of local government under the Labour party where compulsory competitive tendering has not been brought to bear.

Mr. Blunkett: Why should not compulsory competitive tendering apply where the private sector is involved and direct service organisations are excluded? In Committee, just before the closure motion on clause 8 was moved, the Minister said that if no direct service organisation was involved

"Compulsory competitive tendering provisions would not then apply: they apply only where a local authority is considering using its direct service organisation"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 11 February 1992; c. 305.]

Why, if the private sector alone is involved, does compulsory competitive tendering not apply and the proper comparisons of cost do not apply? Why do they apply only if the local authority chooses to involve its own direct service organisation in tendering?

Mr. Portillo: If a local authority has chosen to go out to the private sector for a piece of work, it stands to reason that there is no advantage to that local authority in awarding the work to a particular contractor as none of them works for it. Subject to the views of its auditors, who may review what it does subsequently, the local authority awards the contract where it will obtain the highest quality work for the lowest price. Only where the authority wishes to use its own in-house work force to compete does the compulsory competitive tendering regime apply.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) comes over all innocent as though wondering why that should be. I refer him back to the quotes from Keva Coombes, the former leader of Liverpool council. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well the devious steps taken by Labour authorities up and down the

[Mr. Portillo]

country to fix competition in favour of in-house direct service organisations. That is the answer to his question, and it is a perfectly obvious one.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Is my hon. Friend aware that, under the present regime, Lancashire county council lost the citizens of Lancashire about £600,000 by giving way to an in-house tender—I believe that it was for school meals? We want to do away with such practices.

Mr. Portillo: I am sorry to hear what my hon. Friend says.

The Bill will not only extend the compulsory competitive tendering regime through the possibility of considering quality and cost separately in relation to new ranges of services, but will enable the Secretary of State to specify a series of practices that he considers to be uncompetitive. Therefore, the practices that have been taking place in a number of local authorities to fix the competition in favour of the direct service organisation can be ruled out in future by order of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. We shall be able to specify a series of practices, of which we now have a growing number of examples, which until now have been used in order to distort the competition, not only in favour of the direct service organisation, but against the benefit and interests of the consumer. That is what the debate is all about.

The legislation is about providing services to local people for the best possible value for money, recognising that that money has to come from local taxpayers and that the best value services can be provided through competition. Just this week, we have had another example of the advantages of compulsory competitive tendering. A recent survey on the cleanest cities in Europe gave the lie to the Labour party's denigration of our capital, as London came second in the table.

The part of London surveyed in order to show that it was the second in the league in Europe was not, surprisingly enough, Hackney, Lambeth, Southwark or Haringey, but Westminster—the very heart of our capital, where the services were put out to tender some time ago.

Mr. Bellotti: If the Minister is so convinced that compulsory competitive tendering is finding favour, where is it doing so? It is not finding favour with any of the local authority associations. The Royal Institute of British Architects and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations are both opposed to it. Everyone outside the House is opposed to it. From where does the support come?

Mr. Portillo: I think that the hon. Gentleman must keep his head under a bushel. Local authorities up and down the country are ahead of the Government. The Bill merely brings up the rear. Compulsory competitive tendering will simply bring into line those local authorities which have not taken up voluntary competitive tendering. If the hon. Gentleman has contacts in local authorities, he should know that local authorities throughout Britain are seizing the opportunity of competitive tendering as a good chance to manage their resources more efficiently and to find the best value for money for their local taxpayers. I make no claim that the legislation will influence the best authorities in the country, which are already far ahead of us and are showing the limits of what can be achieved by putting their services out to competitive tendering.

The new clause constitutes a naked attempt by the Labour party once more to resist the process of competitive tendering; once more to resist the introduction of competition in local services; once more to defend the unions in local government, because they are in hock to those unions; and once more to deny decent services to local taxpayers. We will have none of it, and that is why we reject the new clause.

Mr. Bellotti: Compulsory competitive tendering is a subject of wide concern outside the House. I have already said that the local authority associations are opposed to it. Of course the best local authorities want competitive tendering, but they do not want it to be made compulsory: they want choice, because they are nearest to the people. Let us look, for example, at the quality of our architecture. It is no wonder that the Royal Institute of British Architects is opposed to compulsory competitive tendering——

It being Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [17 February], put the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 203, Noes 275.

Division No. 97] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter

Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Killoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terence
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ray Powell and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'th's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Mariand, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David

Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

MR. SPEAKER *then put forthwith the remaining Questions which he was directed to put at that hour.*

Question put, That the remaining amendment standing in the name of a member of the Government be made to the Bill:—

The House divided: Ayes 275, Noes 202.

Division No. 98] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*

Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allason, Rupert
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terence
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ray Powell and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment No. 5, in clause 1—*Publication of information as to standards of performance*—page 2, line 11, at end insert—

'(2A) The Secretary of State may by order made by statutory instrument vary the period for the time being specified in paragraph (b) of subsection (2) above so as to fix the latest time for the publication of information in accordance with that paragraph at any such time, within the period of nine months after the end of the financial year in question, as may be specified in the order; and a statutory instrument containing an order under this subsection shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'

—accordingly made.

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's consent signified.]

Motion made, and Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Portillo.]*

The House divided: Ayes 269, Noes 201.

Division No. 98] **[10.27 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allason, Rupert
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis

Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terence
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ray Powell and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation)

10.38 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): I beg to move,

That the draft Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations 1992, which were laid before this House on 4th February, be approved.

The regulations will be made under the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979. The purpose of the regulations is to increase by 5 per cent. the amounts of compensation paid under the Act to those who first satisfy all the conditions of entitlement on or after 1 April 1992.

The 1979 Act set up a scheme to provide lump sum payments to sufferers from dust-related diseases or, when the sufferers have died, to their dependants. In law, the remedy for people suffering from those diseases is to sue the employer concerned for damages. But, because of the time it takes for the disease to develop, diagnosis may not be made for 20 to 30 years or more after exposure and the employer or employers responsible may no longer exist. The aim of the scheme, therefore, is to provide a measure of compensation to those who cannot claim it in the normal way through the courts. I must stress, however, that it has never been the intention of the Act to provide an alternative to taking civil action in the courts.

There are three basic conditions of entitlement which must be satisfied before a payment is made to a claimant: that there is no relevant employer who can be sued; that no court action has been brought and no compensation has been received in respect of the disease; and that disablement benefits have been awarded.

The conditions of the Act are interpreted by my Department as sympathetically as the Act will allow, but we must ensure that the payment conditions are met.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I am sorry to interrupt but does the Department's interpretation cover Scots law? Will the Minister look sympathetically on a ten-minute Bill —it is the only way that one can raise the matter—on 17 March? The reason for its introduction is a report of the Law Commission due on 5 March, which will seek to remedy the anomaly that estates in Scotland cannot claim in the same way as estates in England. That disadvantages some thousands of people, particularly those who worked with asbestos and suffer from mesothelioma in some way, who worked in the construction industry and in particular the shipyards.

Mr. Forth: As the hon. Gentleman has raised the matter on a previous occasion, I am aware of his continuing interest in it. As he said, the report has yet to be published. We are not yet aware of what it will recommend, but I am confident that whatever recommendations it makes will be considered sympathetically in the light of the facts that the hon. Gentleman has raised. I will certainly ensure that the point that he raised is brought to the attention of my colleagues in the Scottish Office in order that weight is added to his request for it to be considered in the light of the matter that we are debating this evening.

The Government have given an undertaking to Parliament to review the amounts regularly to maintain the value of the payments under the terms of the regulations. Last year, Parliament approved an increase of 9 per cent. from April to take account of the movement in the index of retail prices during the preceding 12 months. The proposed increase this year is 5 per cent., the aim, again, being to keep the payments in line with inflation. I wish to re-emphasise that my Department does all that it can to administer the Act in a sympathetic way. We recognise that each case is an individual disaster and we are as generous as the statute will allow.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): But does the Minister recognise that the rationalisation of hospital provision in coalfields which no longer have any coal mines or, like south Wales, have few coal mines has created a deep fear among men who are still in the industry that expertise in diagnosing pneumoconiosis contracted, for example, in the past decade simply will not be available in future? Has he anything to say about that? It is a great worry to people currently working in the industry.

Mr. Forth: I understand the basis for such misgivings, but they are misplaced. I am confident that the machinery available through both the Department of Social Security procedures necessary to establish the claim to benefit and the medical boards which are called in wherever necessary will be available on a permanent basis. Although I recognise the developments that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, I see no reason to believe that they will reduce the level of expertise that is available to make a fair and proper assessment of claims. I can give the hon. Gentleman that reassurance.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I thank the Minister for saying that, and I hope that he will put pressure on his right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Health to maintain the facilities available within the South Glamorgan area to service the coal mining communities that we represent. However, it is not as simple as that. There are outstanding instances throughout the south Wales coalfield of, for example, miners who are diagnosed as 100 per cent. in life and receive a disability pension and benefits relating to the disease, but on death at the post mortem they are excluded from the lump sum benefit outlined in the regulations.

It is not simple. We have had to face distressing situations with families who suddenly find themselves destitute because no compensation is payable after death, although the miner or ex-miner had received compensation for a considerable period when alive.

Mr. Forth: I confess that I have not been aware of the problem that hon. Members have mentioned. They should write to me with the appropriate background and details to the cases. If a problem arises from the administration of the regulations I shall certainly want to consider it. I have already given an undertaking that our concern is to ensure that we give the maximum allowable under the regulations because, by definition, they are designed to deal with real human distress. If there is an inhibition in the regulations I would want to ensure that it was dealt with, as far as possible.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I have no reason to doubt the sincerity of the Minister, but, following on from the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), it is usually found on post mortem that the deceased was suffering from emphysema. May I draw the Minister's attention to the report of the Institute

of Occupational Medicine at Edinburgh university, which discusses the causes of disability in coal miners. I shall pass the report to the Minister. A passage in it states:

"There was a clear association between the occurrence of . . . emphysema and the amount of dust to which a man had been exposed during life, allowing for the effect of age and smoking. This association was more definite in men showing some dust-related fibrosis and emphysema was more likely the greater the coal contact of the dust exposure."

In other words, there is evidence to show that emphysema in coal miners has been caused through the conditions that they were working in. That concern is expressed by many families of former mine workers. Therefore, will the Minister consider the situation carefully and try to impart to his colleagues at the Department of Health that compensation should be paid to coal miners with emphysema because of the evidence available, according to the Institute of Occupational Medicine in Edinburgh? Perhaps the Minister would take note of that and a copy of the report could be obtained, in the interests of miners and their dependants.

Mr. Forth: I am advised that in January 1990 the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council—the independent body which advises the Secretary of State for Social Services on the prescription of industrial diseases—announced a further study of bronchitis and emphysema in workers in the metal-producing industries. A further IIAC study on bronchitis and emphysema in coal miners was also announced in October 1991 and the results of both studies should be published later this year. I think that that shows that the problem that the hon. Member mentioned has been recognised in the sense that it is being looked into. Although such studies always take longer than many hon. Members would wish, I think that that answers the hon. Gentleman's point. It is being actively considered and will be reported on later this year.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The Minister appears to believe that the study commenced in 1991. If he checks the record, he will find that my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) has presented a Bill to deal with this problem on at least half a dozen times in the past decade. Surely we do not need to consider further research at this stage, given that a great deal of research was carried out more than 10 years ago.

Mr. Forth: The problem is that we are dealing with an issue that is subject to contention and judgment. We are talking about the attribution of particular conditions to particular working environments. The issue involves the payment of compensation and the judgment of eligibility for such payments. I hope that the Opposition accept that we must get matters right, in fairness to the sufferers and, if I may dare say in this context—I hope that hon. Members will not take this amiss—the taxpayers. It is a tax-funded scheme which is designed to compensate.

I believe that the study that I have mentioned is a step in the right direction. I ask hon. Members to be patient for just a little longer until its results are available. If it shows that the connections mentioned by the Opposition exist, I am confident that the appropriate action will be taken. However tempting it might be, a private Member's Bill is not necessarily the right means by which to pursue the matter.

Mr. Rogers: Part of the problem is obtaining the correct diagnosis in life. Pneumoconiosis is caused by the scarring of the lung tissue by silicates that are inhaled. That ailment is often obscured by other associated diseases, as outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien). With the use of electron microscopy one can detect pneumoconiosis, but, unless such sophisticated equipment is used, the proper diagnosis is not obtained. Therefore, many people who should receive benefit do not and that is why my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) has pushed his Bill. It would clear up such areas of doubt.

Mr. Forth: The studies that I have mentioned should cover that problem. If hon. Members are not satisfied that my comments cover the issue raised, they should take the matter up with me so that I can do my best to ensure that their concerns are met. If necessary, we shall reconsider the issue in another study. That is the way in which to proceed.

No one wants to conceal matters or to delay their resolution. Opposition Members are expert in this problem and deal with many constituency cases and I am sure that they understand that progress must be steady and undertaken on a proper basis. We are dealing with complex, often contentious, matters. However, as the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) suggested, many of the problems can be overcome with advanced technology.

Given the background, it is right that we should identify the areas of difficulty and then identify how to resolve them. If hon. Members are not satisfied with my proposals, they should raise the matter with me in the normal way.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): I welcome my hon. Friend's guarantee to address immediately any recommendations that the report may make. There are just as many Conservative Members as Labour Members who are anxious that this matter should be addressed.

Mr. Forth: I would not like to dispute whether my hon. Friend is numerically accurate, but I would not dispute my hon. Friend's commitment to his constituents, which is at least the equal of that of any Opposition Member.

I hope that there is no contention about this issue. All hon. Members with constituents affected by pneumoconiosis deal with matters that involve issues of great tragedy and family and human deprivation. I hope that my Department always handles such cases sensitively and positively within the terms of the existing regulations. We are talking here about the somewhat different issue of any definition or redefinition of the boundaries within which the regulations operate. We need not be divided on that, and I hope that we can move forward on it.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): We are nearing a general election. Sensitive to their election prospects, the Government have in recent weeks been saying and doing things that have not been unhelpful to our constituents. Tonight, on the eve of the election, Opposition Members are offering the Minister a chance to win some glory. Recognising the correlation between emphysema and pneumoconiosis and the fact that payments are made according to certain guidelines, we invite the Minister to say that the Government will make a positive recommendation to the body examining the whole issue to the effect that the link between emphysema and pneumoconiosis should be strengthened to the point at which private Member's legislation on the subject is acceptable. That would mean it becoming law tomorrow.

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

We simply want a commitment from the Minister, on behalf of the Government, that they will support our case. That might result in the Conservatives pinching another vote. Or we might pinch another 20,000 votes. It is election time. The Minister should do the right thing and say that the Government support us in principle.

Mr. Forth: It is with some trepidation that I tell the hon. Gentleman, in view of his experience in this place, that were he to find himself a Minister in a future Labour Government, which might surprise him more than it would surprise me—but one never knows—he would find that what he seeks is not as simple as he suggests. Given the nature of the area that we are discussing, it is not just a question of a Minister waving a wand and saying, "Because I wish it to be so, it shall be so." If it were that easy, Opposition Members would be suspicious, and rightly so.

I have said that there is an ongoing study into the point that Opposition Members have raised. That will report later this year. I have no doubt that if that report found what they believe it will find, the appropriate action would follow. That is the right course, rather than Ministers giving instant responses, tempted though they might be by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

We recognise each case on its merits and deal with it as generously as possible. I emphasise that the purpose of the Act has never been to take on the liabilities of employers, and we must be satisfied that there is no employer against whom a single claim for damages could be made. It is a long-standing measure which the House debates each year. I hope that, having heard my remarks, hon. Members will support the regulations.

10.57 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): We must place in context the fact that every one of those who benefit under the regulations and all those about whom my hon. Friends are talking have suffered considerably because of the actions of their former, and in some cases their continuing, employers. They have given their health for the nation's economy.

The regulations do not deal directly with the coal industry, in which a superior compensation scheme is already in existence. Even so, the experience of my hon. Friends and the testimony that they bring before the House about the difficulties of claiming under British Coal's scheme and the scheme under the regulations are relevant, because much frustration exists. People who have been diagnosed by their GPs, and having had that diagnosis confirmed by a consultant, still find themselves refused compensation under either scheme because they are considered to have insufficient disability to benefit.

The Minister said that his Department always tries to treat each case sympathetically, but we are talking about an extremely vulnerable group of people and time is often of the essence. The overwhelming bulk of people who benefit under the pneumoconiosis regulations are former asbestos workers. As I am one of those former asbestos workers, I have a certain vested interest in the regulations. The pattern of ages at which people begin to be seriously affected by the impact of asbestos shows that it happens many years after they have worked in that industry.

For example, of those assessed as suffering from asbestososis in 1990, the overwhelming majority were in their late 50s or older before their condition was diagnosed. At that stage in life, people often feel that they cannot wait for a prolonged review on whether the regulations can be extended. The matter is therefore urgent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) raised an associated matter. He rightly pointed out that the full impact of those conditions is often visible only at an autopsy.

Mr. Rogers: To illustrate that point, my brother-in-law left a colliery in south Wales in 1945 and went to live in Newark, where he worked in Ransome and Marles until he had another industrial accident. Only about 10 years ago, when he was 70 or 73, he was diagnosed—as a result of action by the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers, which helped him, from its Nottingham office, to have a proper medical examination—as having pneumoconiosis. That was almost 40 years after he had left the industry, but he had been insidiously ill all the time.

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend's point is valid. Of the 24 asbestos workers who were considered to be between 80 and 100 per cent. disabled in 1990, all but four were in their 60s. They had been exposed to asbestos early in their working lives and the full impact of that exposure had been diagnosed only at that late stage.

Although the Minister is right to say that compensation is funded by direct taxation, we are not talking about vast sums of taxpayers' money in relative terms, but of some £1·5 million in the current financial year. Neither are we talking about massive pay-offs to a lucky—I use that word hesitantly—minority who benefit under the scheme. A typical payment this year will be about £10,000. One must go down the different scales of assessment to see who will qualify for a payment of £10,000. Specifically, for someone suffering 30 per cent. disability to receive £10,000, he or she must be at least 60 years of age. The Minister must appreciate that people will receive relatively little compensation towards the end of their lives, even though they may have suffered for many years.

I hope that the Minister will consider other issues sympathetically, because the Government have the power to look afresh at the defects in the scheme. They should consider in particular the relative advantages in the coal industry scheme, an important feature of which is the opportunity for reassessment. One of the problems with pneumoconiosis and asbestosis is that they are progressive and the compensation is awarded according to the level of disability when the initial diagnosis takes place. Under the coal board scheme—I checked this information today with the National Union of Mineworkers, which has more experience of it than anybody—in the most recent year for which figures are available, although some 300 new pneumoconiosis cases were placed on the books, about 150 people returned for reassessment because their condition had deteriorated.

We know that, in any given year, half of those presenting themselves could be replicated by people who should go back for re-examination. Under the coal board scheme, that is possible, but it is not possible under the regulations. Somebody who, at the age of 50, is assessed as being 10 per cent. disabled will receive the grand sum of a

little more than £10,000. In another two or three years, he might have become 50 per cent. disabled so he will have forgone the extra £20,000 that he would have received if he had been—I say this hesitantly—lucky enough to be patient and to wait until he was diagnosed as having severe pneumoconiosis. That does not seem to be a fair and acceptable way to run a scheme, as it appears to be a lottery as to when one is first taken on to the doctor's books.

Another advantage of the coal industry scheme is that allowance is made for people who can continue to work, albeit on reduced earnings. It is recognised that someone who cannot do the work that he was once capable of doing is still given some allowance to make up his earnings to guarantee an acceptable standard of living. No such facility exists in the regulations. Those two changes would transform the regulations and the position of the many victims of past industrial practices.

The bulk of claimants under the regulations are former asbestos workers. The Minister may or may not be aware of it, but it is far from being beyond living memory that while management in industries such as the asbestos industry knew very well of the dangers of asbestos—that it was a major cause of cancer and that asbestosis was a particularly unpleasant way of killing employees—the safety practices of that industry were outrageous. That is not an abstract observation; I have seen and breathed the conditions in those factories at the time. Some people of my generation will be recipients of the scheme in years to come, and will doubtless be grateful for any change that the Minister can make.

I should like to place on record my appreciation of the continuing interest in the regulations of my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Lamond). He would have been with us tonight but, unfortunately, he had to chair a Committee in another part of the House. Over the years, he has taken a keen interest in the problems of his constituents who have suffered from a condition prevalent in the textile industry: byssinosis.

My hon. Friend repeatedly asked Ministers to reconsider the position in that industry. The common practice, particularly among women workers, was to spend a lifetime moving from one firm to another, with short stays at each firm. Therefore, it becomes almost impossible to identify the specific time and firm responsible for the byssinosis suffered by the women later in life. The Minister has already outlined the difficulty that they face. As some firms may still trade and, theoretically, the women may have a claim for compensation against a firm, they cannot claim under the regulations.

According to the *Employment Gazette* of September 1991, the number of people presenting themselves as sufferers of byssinosis is low; it is literally fewer than three dozen. If we were to consider making the scheme a little more liberal in its interpretation, we could do something significant, at little cost to the scheme's funding, for those who are suffering in a particularly unpleasant way.

The total funding for this financial year will be about £1·5 million. The Minister will be able to conform that, in recent years, the overall number of claimants coming forward and the total financial liability of the scheme have both dropped. Next year's budget for the scheme is £1·4 million—less in both cash and real terms than this year's expenditure. I trust that the budget is based on the recognition that the number of people coming forward is diminishing. I hope, however, that the Minister can assure us that, if there is a shortfall next year, no attempt will be made to limit the number of people who can benefit under the scheme.

As I have said, every one of the people concerned is a victim of the industrial practices of our society. They are our common responsibility, because they gave their health for the sake of industrial production. We are in debt to them, and the last Labour Government recognised that by introducing the regulations: they were one of the last pieces of legislation that they introduced, and they are particularly important to the victims to whom I have referred.

The Minister has announced an uprating of around 5 per cent., in line with the retail prices index. In the light of that, my hon. Friends and I will not oppose the motion. However, there are a number of ways in which the victims' lives could be made at least a little easier in what are, in many cases, their final years, given some easement in the interpretation of the scheme. I hope that the Minister will consider carefully what has been said, and will assure us that he will at least examine in detail whether such easement is possible.

11.10 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I wish to address my few remarks to the provision for victims of the consequences of working with asbestos. I pay tribute to the *Isle of Wight County Press*, which has constantly reported the number of cases of mesothelioma among workers who were employed in the shipyard industries on the Isle of Wight and worked in a heavy asbestos environment. Articles and letters in our local paper describe the atmosphere as being like a white snowstorm. Recently, an article spoke of apprentices engaging in "snowball fights" with asbestos.

I understand that one of the problems with the disease is that it does not always show up on an ordinary chest X-ray. I have sought the advice of our director of public health, Dr. Brian Keeble, and have asked whether, now that the island has raised the money for its own scanner, it would be possible to organise a programme of screening for the island's population in view of the large number of people employed in our shipyard industry in the past.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Does the hon. Gentleman realise that Jimmy Reid, who did the programme for Channel 4, revealed in that excellent programme that the asbestos danger had first been suspected as long ago as 1898? He has seen documents relating to the 1930s which warned shipbuilding employers about the dangers of asbestos. On the programme, however, we saw John Rannie saying how wonderful it was that his great Queens liners built on Clydeside—I am sure that the same is true of the Isle of Wight—were covered in asbestos, because it would prevent fire. That was all done when, apparently, it was known how dangerous asbestos was to human beings.

Mr. Field: I did not see the programme. Perhaps I could borrow a tape of it from the hon. Gentleman.

I particularly wish to raise the case of Eric Frederick Bolan, who died at the age of 61. Unusually for one of my constituents, he was not, so far as his relatives are aware, employed in the shipyard industry; he was a self-employed painter. From what his family has been able to ascertain, it seems that he worked on a contract with Sandown and Shanklin urban district council, where he was involved in asbestos removal. His son, Mike Bolan, came to see me recently at my surgery on behalf of his mother and I have their permission to raise this case today.

The problem is that it is very difficult for a widow to undertake litigation when a disease is diagnosed only very late or, as has occurred in a number of cases, at the coroner's inquest—a point alluded to by a number of Opposition Members. The Isle of Wight coroner, on account of the high level of employment in the industry, is meticulous about ensuring that the disease is properly diagnosed.

The order provides some financial help, but I am sure that the Minister will appreciate the problems involved in proving a connection with a previous employer. I see that in the Third Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c. which considered these regulations on 14 March 1991 the Minister said, as reported at column 6 of *Hansard*, that if evidence was brought before him as to the way the regulations were operating he would examine it very carefully. I know that it would be a great comfort to all my constituents, as well as to the Bolan family and others who have worked in the shipbuilding industry, if my hon. Friend could reaffirm again today that he will give careful consideration to these concerns when they are drawn to his attention.

11.15 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Many of the pneumoconiosis sufferers who will benefit from the measure suffer also from another disease, emphysema. However, they will receive no compensation for that disease if the pneumoconiosis from which they suffer amounts to no more than 50 per cent. If Conservative Members who do not represent mining community constituencies could see the condition of those who are suffering from 50 per cent. pneumoconiosis as well as emphysema, they would appreciate what suffering these men experience.

On five or six occasions I have introduced Bills to highlight the problems faced by these unfortunate mineworkers. The Minister said earlier that to introduce Bills is not the right way to address the problem, but I can think of no other way in which I could have highlighted it. I believe that the first Bills that I introduced persuaded the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council, under the chairmanship at that time of Professor Lowe, to undertake studies of the problem.

During the research that I undertook before introducing my Bills I presented 19 learned papers to the House. I have caused articles to be published in *The Lancet*, all of which supported the view that mineworkers' emphysema was caused by working underground in coal mines. I was given the opportunity to give both written and oral evidence to the council when it conducted its last inquiry. I challenged the council to refute the learned medical evidence and research papers that I relied upon. I said that if it could do so I would understand if it found against my case. At no time was the council able to refute the medical evidence and research that I had presented. It was strong research, much of it headed by Dr. Anne Cockroft, a chest consultant who was previously at St. Thomas's hospital.

Many of the men who would have benefited from the regulations have died during the last 10 years. They never received the compensation that was rightfully theirs. Fewer people are suffering now than when I began introducing Bills because, first, improvements have been made in dust suppression and, secondly, there are fewer pits. However, the problem is as great for the widows who have been left behind.

One must see such men to understand their problems. Only a fortnight ago, I saw men in Pontefract general infirmary—previously strong, hard-working miners—who rely on oxygen masks for their existence. They were suffering from emphysema and pneumoconiosis. Emphysema is a far more disabling disease than pneumoconiosis. Men who are suffering from it cannot walk a yard or lift a cup to their lips to drink tea, and they contracted the disease because of their work in the mining industry.

I was encouraged by the Minister saying that he expects a further report from the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council at the end of the year. Has it recently conducted a further investigation of the problem? If so, I am not aware of it.

I do not want to end my few remarks on a sour note, but the last time that the Industrial Injuries Advisory

Council rejected such evidence many people thought that it had been influenced by the Government. I never said that and I have no evidence to suggest that that was true. Professor Harrington, who became chairman of the council, assured me that it was not true. I know that many men have been denied the compensation to which they were entitled for the disease that they contracted from their employment.

I can hope only that the council will advise the Minister that this disease should be prescribed. If it fails to do so, it will ignore all the evidence that has been presented to it. I stand by my remarks to the council: prove that the evidence of the 19 learned papers that I have presented is wrong and I shall have no case. So far, the council has not been able to refute that evidence.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) rightly mentioned one of his constituents, but I assure him that I could mention hundreds of people in my area who have died an early death because of this disease. I welcome any improvement in the regulations, but I hope that the Minister, who said that he is prepared to listen—and I believe him—will influence the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council and refer it to the evidence that is available and the work that has been done, because many senior members of the medical profession have assured me that no more evidence can be advanced to prove that these men are suffering from an industrial disease. The only way that it can be done, other than on the basis of the present evidence, is after a man has died. That is too late. I hope that the Minister will take that on board, give us his sympathy and—if this is the correct word—pressurise the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council. If the council's fear was the high costs involved because there were hundreds and probably thousands of such men, the Minister can tell the council that many are now dead. Will it please try to help those who are left?

11.24 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) illustrates, alas, the need for what has become virtually an annual debate. I should have hoped that we could have passed an uprating motion on the nod or wish it godspeed with a few words. Unfortunately, as my hon. Friend has shown, we have mixed feelings about the motion. He has had the misfortune not to have properly drafted private Members' Bills on the issue passed. I have had the good fortune to have one become law.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) mentioned the shipyards on the Isle of Wight and a particular case. If what he said is true of the Isle of Wight, I leave it to the House to imagine what has, alas, been true of the Thameside and east London areas and of the whole port of London area where, for the past 20 years or so, asbestosis caused by asbestos inhalation has been a scourge. We know of the miners' problems. This is a matter related to the boilers of ships and power stations and to the insulation and equipment of the same, to refrigeration and cold stores, where insulation is also important, and to the lagging of pipes.

For many years the port of London was—and still is in some respects—the biggest port in the country. I need hardly say that in such a dockland area contractors were thick on the ground. As the hon. Member for Isle of Wight said, dockers unloaded unaware of the risks. The problem has existed in east London for a long time and I wish to draw the House's attention to the struggle I had to help one man. The example illustrates something to which many hon. Gentlemen do not give credence—the opportunity that we have to introduce private Members' Bills.

A man came to my advice service one morning, leaning on a stick, wheezing and coughing. He said that his name was Archie Morton and that he was dying. He had been working in dust and asbestos and had tried to get compensation through court action. He was backed by his union and was glad that the case had been settled out of court for £25,000, with which he had purchased a motor car to get around and which he intended to use to give his family a good time, as he said, "before I go".

With the redoutable Mrs. Nancy Tait of the Society for the Prevention of Asbestosis and Industrial Diseases, we plotted what should be done. Mr. Morton was convinced that a post mortem would show that the panel before which he had appeared and which had turned him down had made an incorrect diagnosis. Alas, through a quirk of legislation, Archie Morton never had a post mortem, so the truth of his condition was never known.

As a result, I had the honour and privilege of introducing in the House in 1981 the Industrial Diseases (Notification) Bill, which was then enacted. Under the Bill, if a general practitioner or hospital surgeon had cause to think that a person's occupation might have been a contributory factor to his death, he could mark the death certificate accordingly and so cause a post mortem to be held. We cannot identify the accuracy of tribunals and panels, to which my hon. Friends have referred, unless checking can be done by such means.

The Act is also, I hope, a tool for detecting industrial or occupational diseases hitherto unknown. It is only by backtracking through medical investigation of people whose lives may have been foreshortened by virtue of their occupation that we can uncover hitherto unknown industrial risks.

Mr. Barry Field: I do not wish to sound unnecessarily contentious, but when the hon. Gentleman mentioned the case of Archie Morton on an earlier occasion he stated that the post mortem showed that Archie Morton

"was justified in going to the panel, which turned him down time after time."—[*Official Report*, 5 March 1990; Vol. 168, c. 692.]

The report says that a post mortem was indeed carried out.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. That may have been the case. It is two years since I made that speech and my memory may be at fault. The point is valid either way. When that case happened, post mortems were not so general as they are now. The point of principle is clearly there. The fact that my local newspaper, the *Newham Recorder*, lists cases year after year in which the Walthamstow coroner certifies death from asbestosis shows that man after man and family after family are in that unhappy position.

In that area, for some reason that I do not understand, there still appears to be official resistance. My hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford mentioned the report that has been sent to the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council. According to what he said—I am sure that he is right—there is a good deal of medical evidence to back up a case for compensation, but so far it has been

[Mr. Spearing]

officially refused. I presume that the council says that positive evidence cannot be found to prove that, among other matters which may be involved, there is a positive link between the occupation and, in the case that my hon. Friend mentioned, emphysema.

In this area, we should give the benefit of the doubt to the family and to the person who has suffered an early death. In the case of the existing panel, it is not a matter of proving a link, because the link has already been proved for miners, slate quarry workers and asbestosis victims. My experience of cases about which constituents have written to me is that there is still some dissatisfaction among Members of Parliament and among the families who write to us about the procedures of the panel.

I do not want to go into individual cases or to go into scientific detail at this point—I do not think that that would be right or reasonable—but if the Society for the Prevention of Asbestosis and Industrial Diseases or any of my hon. Friends can put particular matters to the Minister, will he undertake to consider them seriously?

It is unfortunate that we have to have this debate annually or biennially to uprate what is due to sufferers. It should not be necessary. My constituents look around and see great expenditure on public works, some useful and some not so useful. Nearly £1,000 million is being spent on roads and railways, with some not yet being developed in the docklands. Yet in pneumoconiosis cases, which would not involve much public expenditure, there is still a need for much letter-writing to establish proof. We have to be more careful about what we do.

I hope that the Minister will consider the procedures carefully so that there will be no suspicion of Victorian penny-pinching and we may give these unfortunate people and their families what they should have.

11.35 pm

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I will be brief. I want to draw the Minister's attention to the struggle that we had to establish pneumoconiosis as an industrial disease and the problems and difficulties that many of us have since faced in our constituencies to get just rewards for sufferers not only of pneumoconiosis but of asbestosis. It still is a struggle. We should not allow the Minister to feel that we are happy with the uprating and with the scheme. However good the scheme is, our constituents have enormous difficulty in getting into it.

In the history of pneumoconiosis, the dread of widows was that it would be below heart attack, hypertension and emphysema as a cause of death. Although it might be obvious that the other illnesses were a consequence of the pneumoconiosis, because that was not the primary cause of death—in other words, because it was not at the top of the list, because the doctor had been careless—compensation might not be paid. Fortunately, the scheme now says that if pneumoconiosis is a contributory factor to death, compensation can be paid. That was a substantial step forward.

There is still a problem about the mobility allowance. Constituents who live in a valley have only two options—to go up or down. When the person goes for a medical examination for the mobility allowance, ease of perambulation on a flat surface is the criterion for the award. However much one tries to point out to doctors that constituents cannot go to a shop without going downhill and then back uphill, or vice versa, the regulations do not allow that to be taken into account. There is a constant battle to get compensation.

With pneumoconiosis there is also the problem of diagnosis in life; often it can be proven only by a post mortem. A person will suffer for a long time when the pneumoconiosis is shrouded by associated illnesses such as emphysema.

I mentioned one of my family. I could have mentioned others who went through life being diagnosed as having emphysema. Only in death was pneumoconiosis discovered. For 30 or 40 years, the compensation that should have been paid to them was not paid. When the Minister receives the report—from yet another body that is looking into the matter—he should consider carefully not just the framework of the scheme but access to it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) mentioned the problems of asbestosis, as did the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field). Asbestosis is a problem which, oddly enough, does not arise particularly often in mining valleys, but one of my constituents had been working in the dismantling of the power station at Aberthaw and landed up with asbestosis. One of the problems with that disease—as opposed to pneumoconiosis—is that the asbestos fibres that get into the lung do not merely scar the tissue, which is then more readily identified in normal X-rays; the fibres are shrouded by carcinogenic growths and one cannot even diagnose asbestosis because of the growths. It requires a specialist in quite a narrow field to identify the problem.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South, I pay tribute to Nancy Tait of the Society for the Prevention of Asbestosis and Industrial Diseases for the enormous amount of work that she has done. One constituent of mine had come to the end of his tether. He had struggled to get compensation. He was dying of cancer of the lung as a result of asbestos fibres. He had been offered the derisory figure of about £2,500. Hon. Members know what it is like with some cases: one has to be a lawyer; one has to bone up on medical knowledge to fight the case and slog away at it. After two years of hard work, my constituent received £75,000. Two or three years before, he had been told, "It is £2,500 or nothing."

The attitude of employers in the industry who are not prepared to compensate even though they are not taking the proper safety precautions to protect people handling these known death-giving substances also needs to be looked at again. It is only with the development of electromicroscopy that asbestosis can be properly identified, because of the shrouding of the fibres by what are often carcinogenic growths.

I reiterate that we can create the most fantastic schemes, with the most fantastic amounts of compensation but unless we facilitate access to the schemes to enable people to obtain that compensation, the schemes might as well not be there in the first place. I plead with the Minister to look carefully at the report when it is published so that our constituents and his—I am sure that he has the same problems—can receive the benefit to which they are justly entitled.

11.43 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I cannot pretend that I can speak on this matter with anything like the personal authority of my hon. Friends the Members for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) and for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers). I do, however, speak with sincere passion. I became a Member of Parliament partly through an act of the now defunct Shale Miners Union and with the support, at the selection conference, of the National Union of Mineworkers. As a non-miner, I have always felt a special obligation and during my first 10 years in the House that obligation very often took the form of going to constituents' homes and finding oneself talking to men of 50 or 55 who could not climb their own stairs for lack of breath. To a non-miner, that leaves a lasting effect.

Peggy Herbison and others struggled to have chronic bronchitis, emphysema and pneumoconiosis scheduled as industrial diseases. It was a long, hard struggle because the truth of the matter is that the price of coal is too often pneumoconiosis and, frankly, life itself. If anybody asks questions about my strident support for nuclear power, it is partly that I have attended far too many funerals of middle-aged and young miners to think that if there is an alternative we should make use of it. But I digress.

I wish to direct the Minister's attention to this urgent, special Scottish problem and to express my good fortune that this morning, after queuing from half past six, if that is good fortune, I was able to table a motion for a ten-minute Bill for 17 March entitled "The Effect of Death on Damages (Scotland) Bill". The motion states:

> "That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision in Scotland similar to that in England and Wales in respect of the effect of the death of a person upon any claim by or on behalf of that person for compensation or damages; to make specific provision for the making of claims in respect of asbestosis, mesothelioma and other industrial diseases and conditions; and for connected purposes."

Normally, ten-minute Bills, unfortunately, are tilting at windmills. We all know that a ten-minute Bill hardly ever becomes law. However, I make a special case to the Minister on this occasion. On 5 March, the Scottish Law Commission will report on this very subject, as indeed the Minister has acknowledged. There is every reason to believe that the Law Commission will come down, as every other expert has, on the side of the argument for bringing Scottish law into line with English law in this respect. I am not one of those who think that Scottish law is in any way inferior to English law—often it is better—but, bluntly, in this case it is a jolly sight worse.

I refer the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) to a remarkably powerful Channel 4 documentary called "The Cost of a Ship", which was done by my old friend Jimmy Reid, and produced by Bill Thomson. It makes the point that, along with many Scots, we are ashamed of ourselves in this matter of our law. I shall tell the House of Commons precisely what has been happening.

Lawyers acting on behalf of their clients have used delay as a tactic. In England, estates can pursue legal proceedings. In Scotland, once death takes place, the level of compensation is very much less and the estate cannot operate in the same way as in England. The sum and substance of that is that the west of Scotland has the highest rate of mesothelioma among any white population anywhere in the world. That is because of the history of the shipyards. On that film, we saw the late John Rannie—he was a considerable man in many ways and I do not decry him—boasting that, as manager of the yard which produced the enormous Queens liners, he was extremely proud that they had been working on asbestos and spraying it to cut down the risk of fire.

I have gone through the agony of a school, Linlithgow Academy, with asbestos problems—the whole place has to be evacuated. The relevant Minister, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), was very generous about the matter and we had an extremely good interview with him from Lothian region. I have to say in the same breath that the Scottish Office itself now has to move out of new St. Andrews house for precisely the same problems. The Minister knows the agony that his Scottish colleagues are going through.

The truth of the matter is that asbestos is a very dangerous substance. I wish to ask the Government a particular and precise question arising out of Jimmy Reid's film. I did not know this, although I have been immersed in the subject with a constituency case—the cause célèbre of Alec Horne—but in that programme Jimmy Reid and his researchers asserted that the danger of asbestos was first suspected in 1898. They further asserted that they had seen papers which showed that in the 1930s massive amounts of paper was submitted to the shipyard owners stating that asbestos was dangerous.

I do not pretend that the evidence has the same precision as that now produced by the electromicroscopes to which my hon. Friend the Member for the Rhondda referred. Nevertheless, the direct question is this: in the view of the Department of Employment, in what year or group of years did it first become evident that asbestos was so dangerous? The answer to that question is obviously important because of the interpretation in the courts. It is one thing if the employers had evidence that what they were doing was dangerous for their employees. That is a huge question mark, for compensation.

The change in the law is urgent. I must be frank with the Minister. Our worry is that, whoever wins the election, the matter will somehow be relegated down the list to 1993. My hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford knows exactly the history of legislation such as this being pushed down the list. I do not pretend that if my right hon. and hon. Friends come to power the first, second or third Bill will be on this subject. Equally, if there is a new Conservative Government I doubt that the matter will be high on the list. Parliament will find other, more pressing matters.

I am told, however, that there is such a degree of agreement among officials and Ministers that with good will a Bill could be put through. I do not suggest that a ten-minute Bill, let alone my Bill, is the way to do it. I believe that such measures should be introduced by the Government with the aid of the departmental lawyers and not with the resources available to private Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford nods in assent because he knows the difficulty.

The Department of Employment would have the unanimous support of my Scottish Labour colleagues—I have talked to almost all, if not all, those concerned—if it introduced a Bill as soon as the Law Commission reported. I gather that that would not be difficult and that the Scottish Office knows exactly what has to be done to synchronise the law between Scotland and England. I plead with it to take action, for the sake of sufferers who are getting older, more desperate and in greater need, and in view of the fact that it is asserted by Jimmy Reid and Bill

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

Thomson who have gone into the matter that mesothelioma has not yet peaked. As my hon. Friends have said, it is a delayed action.

I do not want to take up any more time. The House has been patient with me. I make an impassioned plea to cut through the red tape and to get hold of the Scottish Office, which I believe has good will in this matter. I believe that the Department of Employment also has good will. I plead with the Government to do something before this Parliament ends its own life.

11.54 pm

Mr. Forth: I shall try to answer the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) immediately because he is tempting me—an English Minister—on to Scottish territory. He has rightly taken the opportunity to raise a matter which is germane to the debate but which unfortunately is complicated by the fact that it is a Scottish Office matter.

The best that I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that I shall ensure that the matters that he has raised are placed before my colleagues in the Scottish Office. However, I must point out something that must be obvious to the House: if the report is published on 5 March, one can immediately envisage the great difficulties that would arise, in terms of the need for parliamentary counsel to draft the necessary legislation and for the means to be found by which both Houses of Parliament could deal with such a measure, however much good will and support there was for it, before the dissolution of the House. I am not prejudging when that might be; I do not know. But, even with the best will in the world, I suspect that it might be difficult to achieve what he is asking of the House.

Having said that—and it is only fair to point it out—I shall ensure that my Scottish Office colleagues are well aware of the matters raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow and shall see what response we can give. I see no reason why my Department cannot be as sympathetic and helpful as possible in that regard.

In replying to this brief debate, I shall re-emphasise a number of matters so that we know where we stand. The regulations deal specifically with cases where there is no longer an employer available or extant against whom someone with one of the conditions in question can take action. That was the closely defined aim of the regulations when they were first promulgated by the last Labour Government in their dying moments. We must remember that because it answers some of the questions asked by hon. Members who have spoken in the debate.

We are talking about cases of defined industrial disease —those which qualify for disablement benefit under the Social Security Acts—so the intention of the Pneunoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979 and the regulations flowing from it were closely defined from the start. That is why it is relatively difficult for those who would seek to extend the scope or the intention of the Act. We have to return to the Act, as we always have to do in the House, to remind ourselves of its original intention.

In reply to the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd), let me say that if someone's case is rejected by the medical board in the first place he has the right to appeal to the medical appeals tribunal. In case anyone thinks that that is some sort of facile arrangement, I must say that 38 per cent. of such appeals are successful. It is a genuine appeal mechanism. The answer to many people who find themselves frustrated by the fact that the board will not recognise their condition, as is required by the regulations, is that the appeal tribunal route is open to them. I always tell my constituents to use the appeal process if it is there, and if 38 per cent. of applicants are successful that demonstrates that it is a proper appeals route.

The hon. Member for Stretford asked me whether there was a cash limit. The answer is no. My Department will meet all claims in full if they fulfil the conditions laid down by the regulations. There is not, has not been and, as far as I am concerned, never will be any suggestion of a cash limitation. I hope that I can set the hon. Gentleman's mind at rest on that.

In answer to the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse), I confirm that a further study into emphysema commenced in October 1991. We expect the results some time later this year. I cannot, and would not in any circumstances, undertake to seek to lean on or influence the body carrying out the study. It is an independent statutory body, set up precisely to be independent of people such as myself, and if the hon. Gentleman were to reflect on it he would not want such a body to be unduly influenced by Ministers. Although that influence might well be benign in some cases, I am sure that he can imagine others in which it might not be so benign. However, I shall undertake to ensure that the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council, which is carrying out the study, is aware of this debate so that it can take into account the points made by the hon. Member for Castleford and Pontefract and by his colleagues, especially the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers). In that way hon. Members' deliberations will be taken into account by those conducting the study. That is the best I can do and I do not want to go further by even implying that there would be any ministerial influence on a statutory independent body.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) who raised similar points should be assured that we will study them closely.

Mr. Dalyell: The hon. Member for Isle of Wight mentioned mesothelioma. Could the Department of Employment ensure that the total knowledge that resides in the Department of Health and the MRC is taken into account? When I made inquiries before I put forward the Effect of Death on Damages (Scotland) Bill, I learnt that there is a great deal of knowledge in various parts of Britain and in the Government machine. However, that knowledge has not been brought together. A proper assessment should be made of the consequences of the disease over a long period. The incidence of that disease has not yet peaked, and that relates to what my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) said about delay. I hope that the Minister can assure me that a serious study of the disease will be made.

Mr. Forth: I give that assurance gladly. The object of this debate is not just to consider the regulations, but to enable hon. Members to express their views. Officials in my Department and others can then study what has been said and follow that up. Where a reply is necessary, I shall give one. I hope that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr.

Dalyell) can confirm that I do that—I hope unfailingly. We shall consider any request for matters to be reviewed to see what can be done under the terms of the regulations.

Mr. Dalyell: Could any further study also include the work of the Scottish Trades Union Congress and Mr. Bill Spiers? The STUC has a great deal of case history at its headquarters in Woodland drive, in Glasgow, which is within the keeping of Bill Spiers. That case history would be extremely valuable, because the STUC, of all organisations, has campaigned, to its credit, for a long time on this issue.

Mr. Forth: It matters not whether that case history is made available as a result of a request from the hon. Gentleman or my officials. I see no reason why such contact should not be possible.

Mr. Rogers: Given that some special pleadings have been made, will the Minister ensure that work of SPAID and Nancy Tait, referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and me, is also taken into account? When the Minister and I were colleagues in the European Parliament we passed regulations relating to the use of asbestos in productive processes in order to combat asbestosis. At that time I discovered that SPAID and Nancy Tait had the best body of clinical and case history anywhere in the world. That lady needs to be consulted.

Mr. Forth: I will ask my officials to consider the best sources of information and the best way in which to utilise them.

Mr. Spearing *rose*——

Mr. Forth: I shall give way once more, but I sense a growing impatience around me—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—and I am sure that hon. Members will understand if I ask that the hon. Gentleman's intervention should be the last.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to the Minister, especially given what he has just said. I would not have thought that there was any question of a vote on the regulations. I am grateful to the Minister for what he said about SPAID and Nancy Tait, but we regret that that good lady, whose husband, a post office engineer, died from asbestosis, has had to do something. Irrespective of party, we believe that such action should have been the responsibility of the Department of Employment, the Minister of Health and the Minister for Social Security. Great though the work of SPAID is, alas, it should not have had to have been undertaken by that great and good lady through that voluntary organisation.

Mr. Forth: That could be said of so much in public life. The hon. Gentleman may wish that all good things flowed from Government. That is not so and, I suspect, never will be so. We rely, rightly, in many ways on individuals and bodies, voluntary groups and others, to carry matters forward, and I regard that as a healthy sign. I join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to anyone, including the lady in question, doing similar work. They deserve our recognition and praise.

I hope that I have answered the points raised in the debate and persuaded the House to support the regulations. I shall be looking to my Department and others to follow up the various points made by hon. Members.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations 1992, which were laid before this House on 4th February, be approved.

PETITION

Redmire Quarry, Wensleydale

12.5 am

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I have the honour to present a humble but weighty petition signed in a two-week period by 7,049 people principally from in and around Wensleydale in my constituency. The petition is supported by eight local organisations, being the Wensleydale Environmental Supporters, the Wensleydale Railway Association, the Wensleydale Rotary Club, the Wensleydale and Swaledale branches of the Council for the Protection of Rural England, the Cleveland and North Yorkshire branches of Transport 2000 and the Yorkshire Dales Society.

It relates to the intention of British Steel to transport 1,400 tonnes of limestone daily from Redmire quarry in Wensleydale to the British Steel Teesside works by road rather than by rail, as at present, and it expresses concern about road safety, traffic congestion and the future of the environment. It states the opposition of the local community to the planned transfer from rail to road of the freight.

The petition adds:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House urge the Secretary of State to make representations to British Steel that it shall not proceed with its declared intention to transfer limestone shipments between Redmire and Redcar from rail to road transport and to ensure that British Rail actively promotes the use of the railway from Northallerton to Redmire for both freight and passenger traffic.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. John Hall

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

12.7 am

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I feel privileged tonight to raise in the House the case of my constituent, John Hall, of Shetland road, Leicester. I have known John Hall for seven years. He was among the first people I met when I moved to Leicester. I would never have believed that one day I would be standing in the House of Commons, telling the forum of the nation about his case.

John Hall is a brave man. Like millions of his fellow citizens, he has served the nation as a member of our armed forces. He comes from an ordinary family, the kind of family that is the backbone of this country. His wife, Marilyn, is a local justice of the peace and has stood by him during the last few difficult years. She is a woman of courage and I admire her greatly. He has three sons, Colin, Ian and Mark. He and his family have served the people of Leicester well with their various civic duties and the city of Leicester is with them tonight.

For any person to take on the might of the Ministry of Defence is a daunting task, but John Hall is not alone. As a nuclear test veteran, he stands in the shoes of about 22,000 other veterans and their families. He is seen as a test case for the veterans' cause.

The failure of the Ministry of Defence to satisfy the veterans' plea for justice is a stain on the good name of the British armed forces. To make people who were prepared to give their lives for this country campaign for what should be a voluntary act by a grateful nation shows the contempt, spitefulness and wilful neglect of those who have closed the door on compensation.

To treat our veterans in a worse way than the veterans of America, Australia or New Zealand is outrageous. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have raised the matter on many occasions. I particularly wish to acknowledge the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), and my hon. Friends the Members for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) and for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster), as well as the efforts of Conservative Members, including the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) and the hon. Member for Dayyhulme (Mr. Churchill). I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) is in the Chamber tonight. Each of those and many more hon. Members have a constituency interest in the issue.

I also commend the tireless work of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association, Ken McGinley, its chairman, and its committees. Many feature articles have highlighted the veterans' plight in newspapers as different as *The People* and *The Independent*.

John Hall's campaign has been remarkable by any standards. It has included numerous meetings with Defence Ministers and shadow Ministers, including the shadow Foreign Secretary and the Leader of the Opposition. A year ago I met the Prime Minister in his room in this House, and my hon. Friends and I have raised the matter during Prime Minister's Question Time and at other times. Numerous early-day motions have been signed by hundreds of hon. Members and last week I presented a petition with some 10,000 signatures in support of the veterans' cause. Tonight, we bring the campaign back to the House and ask the Minister to act now, before more veterans die.

John Hall is 53 years old. He was born in Burnhope in county Durham and moved to Leicester in 1961. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1956. He was an electrical mechanic and served with 76 squadron of the RAF, which did all the sampling in all the tests in the 1950s. The squadron was responsible for flying through the bomb clouds picking up samples of radiated particles.

John Hall was employed as an aircraft electrician serving the Canberra bombers used in that process. He served at RAF Edinburgh Field from 8 October 1957 until 19 August 1958, during which time he was detached with the squadron to Christmas island in the Pacific ocean from 3 March until 19 May 1958 for Operation Grapple Y. It had gone there for the H-bomb test that took place on 28 April 1958.

John Hall is currently being treated for high-grade, B-cell non-Hodgkin's lymphoma of the centribalistic type. It was orginally diagnosed as hairy-cell leukaemia. He worked on aircraft immediately after they returned to the airfield. He was given gloves and a cotton overall to wear, but no other protective clothing. On Christmas island, most of the aircraft that he worked on had flown through the nuclear cloud several times. Once, he worked on a plane that had not been through a decontamination centre to be washed off.

In 1984, John Hall's wife read in the *Leicester Mercury* of a meeting of service men who had taken part in the nuclear tests of the 1950s. John and Marilyn Hall decided to go because they felt that it was important that there should be a thorough investigation into the servicemen's health problems.

In 1989, John Hall found that he was losing weight and suffering from a shortage of energy. He went to the doctor, who said that he was anaemic and he was then sent to the Royal Infirmary, where he was given blood tests and transfusions. He was put on interferon injections every day for the first six months, then every other day and, until April 1991, three times a week. He now receives chemotherapy and is on drugs known in the trade as "pace bombs" and "chops", That consists of three or four large and painful injections in his arm. I pay tribute to the care and professionalism of the doctors and nurses, and other workers who look after John Hall when he goes to the Royal Infirmary for treatment.

He left work in 1989 as he found that he did not have the energy to do physical work. He needed pain-killing pills, which caused him great problems. Not only could he no longer work, but he could no longer dig his garden or repair his car. He used to love going on walking holidays, but he was unable to walk far without becoming very tired. His appearance has changed dramatically in the past seven years.

When the Ministry of Defence looks into cases that have been brought to its attention by hon. Members, it should take direct evidence from the participants. That has not happened in John Hall's case, or in any other case. At the very least, the Minister should arrange for John Hall to meet MOD officials so that they can take direct evidence from him. They have, to date, relied on written submissions and, as the Minister knows, the delay has been intolerable.

The Minister will rely in his reply on a report that was prepared for the Prime Minister when he wrote to me on

6 February 1992. The report states that the ground crew of 76 squadron were not subject to radiation. How is it, then, that Air Vice Marshal Wilfred Oulton, the task force commander, could write in his book, "The Christmas Island Cracker":

"No personnel, other than the air and ground crews of the Canberra sampling aircraft, should ever be exposed to any radiation."

On pages 130 and 131 of the book he adds:

"The aircraft used for Mosaic and Buffalo might still be too hot to use safely in Grapple or even to stage through international airports like Nandi. Likewise, some of the crews of both air and ground might have reached or be near to their safe limit of exposure to radiation."

How can the MOD ask an independent consultant, as it did in John Hall's case, to make a decision if that consultant is told in the first place that there is no exposure to radiation? One has the conclusions before the evidence is examined.

The report went on to state that there was a 48-hour delay to allow the radioactive material to decay, there being no exception to the rule. But John Hall is emphatic that the men were never told to restrict repairs to maintenance schedules. If a fault occurred which required replacement of an unscheduled component, it would be carried out immediately. He remembers the decontamination centre to have been 50 yards from the 76 lines.

When I met the Prime Minister on 12 March 1991, he demonstrated great concern and sympathy for the plight of John Hall. The Minister of State will recall that the Prime Minister told me of his own knowledge of the suffering of cancer victims as his brother-in-law had died of cancer. I showed him a letter from the son of a nuclear test veteran who had died of cancer, who himself had the illness. In my view, the Prime Minister was clearly moved by that. I told him that the second National Radiological Protection Board report was to be published and I urged his intervention to ensure that that was done speedily. He asked the Minister to do that.

The Prime Minister had already written to me on 29 January 1991 saying:

"We hope that its results will be available by the end of the year."

That was in 1991, and the report has still not been published. Can the Minister say when it will be published? We should also like all the reports that were prepared on operation Grapple Y to be placed in the Library of the House, including those that have hitherto not been published.

While we wait, nuclear test veterans continue to die. It is not just them who suffer, but their families. Last week, I received a letter from Mavis Gardner, the widow's representative for the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association. She writes of the anxiety, hardship and distress caused by delay. She says:

"I do feel that the widows should be remembered when our veterans' cases are brought up, as they are the ones who are suffering after their loss. We have nearly 300 widows on our books, but there must be many more that we do not know about. Even some of the widows have died, but what has happened to their families? We shall never know."

Four weeks ago, the Government announced that the special provision already made for those with haemophilia and HIV would be extended to those who had been infected with HIV as a result of national health service transfusions or tissue transfer in the United Kingdom. The payments will also apply to any of their spouses, partners and children to whom their infection may have been passed on.

The Secretary of State for Health, in a written reply, spoke of compensation being granted because of those people's very special circumstances. Three weeks ago, we read of proposals to compensate people suffering from cancer because of their work on Britain's nuclear submarines and the nuclear deterrent. That was to be on a no-fault basis. Yesterday, in a written answer, the Secretary of State for Defence presented what he described as radical and imaginative proposals to give service men and ex-service men—despite the mobility required of them—new and impressive housing opportunities.

All those announcements show that, where there is a political will, there is a way. On 28 February 1991, the Prime Minister made the following comments about the performance of our armed forces during the Gulf conflict:

"Our forces deserve the highest praise for the courage and professionalism that they have displayed—in the air, on land and at sea . . . Here in our country we may be justifiably proud of our British forces and their commanders . . . The whole nation is proud of them, proud of their families and proud that, through their valour, freedom and justice have prevailed. It has, on this occasion, been a victory for what is right."—[*Official Report*, 28 February 1991; Vol. 186, c. 1118.]

Are we proud of John Hall, and of what he and others did in the service of this country? Is the Minister proud of him? I spoke to him tonight. He has just come out of hospital after being there for three days. His spirits are high: he is eager to continue his civic duties. He is sorry, and I am sorry, that he is not well enough to be here to watch the debate.

It is in the nature of Governments to say no, and in the nature of Oppositions to demand everything yesterday, but this is not a campaign founded on ideology—this is a campaign born out of principle, of men and women who have right on their side, and who claimed and reached the moral high ground far too long ago. The Prime Minister's words show that we must be proud of people like John Hall, and the thousands of other nuclear test veterans in this country. They, indeed, have right on their side. Tonight, the Minister could right a great wrong, and award John Hall and the other nuclear test veterans the compensation that they so richly deserve.

12.22 am

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) on securing the debate. He has, over the years, campaigned—along with other hon. Members—for compensation for those personnel who participated in the United Kingdom's nuclear test programme; now, more specifically, he has raised the sad case of his constituent John Hall.

The question of the nuclear test participants is not a new one; it has been discussed in the House at length. The hon. Member is well aware that the principal difficulty here is that of establishing a causal link between participation in the programme and any subsequent illness. I must emphasise at the outset that there is no such evidence, either in the test participants generally or, more specifically, in the hon. Gentleman's constituent's case.

Considerable concern has been expressed by those who participated in the nuclear test programme, their relatives and hon. Members about the nuclear weapons test

[Mr. Archie Hamilton]

programme conducted in the south Pacific in the 1950s, and the suggestion that those who took part in the tests have now developed illnesses as a result of their participation. The concern is understandable, especially in the light of the widespread publicity given to the sometimes misleading and unfounded allegations that have been made in the past.

The House will be aware that cancer is a common cause of death in the developed world, with some 20 per cent. of deaths being attributed to the disease. Tragically—and it is a sad and inescapable fact—there are over 100,000 cancer-related deaths a year in this country alone. It has been estimated, as I have said in the House before, that some 1,000 of these deaths may be caused by the various natural sources of radiation present all around us. Many participants in the test programme, therefore, would by now be suffering from cancer, or would have died, if they had spent their service entirely in this country and had never gone to the south Pacific.

Before I address the points raised by the hon. Member, I should like to remind the House that the general nuclear safety standards of the tests were in accordance with the standards in force in the nuclear industry today. All individuals who were liable to be exposed to radiation were issued with dosimeters to record the radiation experienced, and those records were kept. The safety regulations in force were consistent with the recommendations of the International Commission on Radiological Protection and advice from the Medical Research Council. Safety precautions were properly monitored and stringently implemented.

While we remain confident that the safety precautions were adequate and that participants were not subjected to any significant health hazards, we have been anxious to alleviate the fears expressed by some of those who participated. Bearing in mind the difficulties in determining causation, it was decided that there should be a study to provide up-to-date and reliable information to show if a problem existed and, if so, its extent. In October 1983, the independent and internationally respected institution, the National Radiological Protection Board, was commissioned to undertake a study of the participants and investigate any correlation with radiation exposure. The study, as the House is aware, compared the mortality and cancer incidence of more than 22,000 men who participated in the tests with a similar group of service men and civilians who were not involved in the tests.

The study, the results of which were published in the *British Medical Journal*, concluded that participation in the tests had had no detectable effect on the participants' life expectancy. Nor did the study establish a causal relationship between the incidence of cancer and participation. In particular, there was no evidence of increased radiation dose, contrary to what might have been expected if those cancers were radiation induced. The study did indicate a small but statistically significant increase in the incidence of certain leukaemias and multiple myeloma in test participants compared with the control group. The control group, however, exhibited an extraordinarily low incidence of these two cancers compared with the average for England and Wales. The NRPB concluded that these differences were likely to be due to chance. Internationally accepted estimates of risk from radiation predict that not one person would be expected to die as a result of exposure to radiation from the United Kingdom's test programme.

I must emphasise that the NRPB study shows no correlation in the incidence of the cancer—high-grade, B cell, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma—from which Mr. Hall is suffering and participation in the test programme.

The Government regard the result of the NRPB study as vindicating their view that the safety precautions adopted during the test programme were effective.

Mr. Vaz: When does the Minister expect that the second report that is currently being investigated will be published? He will recall the meeting with the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's letter to me. May we be told when the second report is likely to be published?

Mr. Hamilton: I am just coming to that question.

The NRPB did, however, recommend that observations on the groups of participants and controls should be maintained for a further 10 years. The Government gladly accepted the suggestion. The NRPB has, therefore, continued to monitor the cancer and mortality incidence of the participants and will publish an updated study this year covering the first five years of this 10-year extension. I know that the hon. Member for Leicester, East wants a more accurate forecast of when the five-year study will come out. I shall write to him about that.

The hon. Gentleman said that he has taken up the case with a number of Members of the Opposition, including the Leader of the Opposition. I should be interested to know whether the right hon. Gentleman undertook, if he became Prime Minister, to pay compensation to the nuclear test veterans. I should be more than happy to give way to the hon. Member for Leicester, East if he would like to enlighten the House on that important point. I see that the hon. Gentleman is silent and I can tell him why: it is because, of the 22,000 test veterans, one would expect, I am afraid, some 20 per cent. to die of cancer. Therefore, by the law of averages, more than 4,000 nuclear test veterans may suffer from cancer. If all of them are to be paid compensation, the bill will be substantial.

Mr. Vaz: The Leader of the Opposition is not the Minister of State at the Ministry of Defence and therefore does not have responsibility. We shall seek the same pledge from the next Labour Government as we are seeking from this Government.

Mr. Hamilton: That is the most unutterable nonsense that I have heard in my life. Why has not the hon. Gentleman obtained a pledge from the Leader of the Opposition? He can say that if he takes office he will fulfil the pledge to compensate all the nuclear test veterans, and he can make that pledge today. The hon. Member for Leicester, East well knows that the right hon. Gentleman cannot make that pledge because the cost to the taxpayer would be unbelievable. It would open the door to compensation to many people who may have cancer through natural causes, and I am afraid that the reality is that a large percentage of people die from cancer and nobody knows the causes. As I have said, there is no causal link between Mr. Hall and the tests on Christmas island in the 1950s.

The hon. Gentleman raised the question of compensation for his constituent, Mr. John Hall, with the Prime Minister last year, and he referred to that in his remarks.

At the Prime Minister's request, the Ministry undertook to investigate Mr. Hall's case. The hon. Member for Leicester, East is aware from the Prime Minister's reply of 6 February and from the report attached to it that the initial difficulty in Mr. Hall's case, as with so many others who participated in the test programme, is that there is simply no evidence of his having been exposed to any radiation.

Mr. Hall served with the Royal Air Force as an electrical mechanic. He was not a member of the active handling flight whose task it was to carry out the aircraft decontamination process. There are no records of film badges having been issued to him, nor is there any record of him being exposed to radiation—and we do not expect there to be. By radiation, I mean occupational radiation. As a member of the public, Mr. Hall will have received natural background radiation amounting to 100 mSv or more over his lifetime.

In the absence of recorded levels of exposure to occupational radiation, only through the statistical studies of the NRPB can we determine whether there is an elevated incidence of radiation-linked diseases among the test participants involving the possibility of a causal link. That is not to say, however, that we shall consider no claims without dosimeter records. It has been repeatedly made clear that we shall consider any claim where any evidence of exposure to ionising radiation can be adduced.

Mr. Vaz: The Minister says that the door is still open provided evidence can be submitted and examined. One of the problems that I highlighted in my speech is that Mr. Hall has never been interviewed by his officials. Will the Minister please agree to allow Mr. Hall to meet officials so that these questions can be put directly to him? One of the problems is that it took a long time to get a reply from the Prime Minister because we relied on written submissions. If he will agree to Mr. Hall being interviewed by officials, many of the problems of the case could be solved. Will he agree to that?

Mr. Hamilton: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman about that. I do not understand how an interview could help because we are talking about the types of cancer from which Mr. Hall suffers. The point is that the NRPB report did not identify Mr. Hall's cancer as being caused by the tests; but I shall come back to the hon. Gentleman on that.

As the report given to the hon. Gentleman makes clear, Mr. Hall has produced no such evidence and, indeed, the only specific claims that have been made were to *The Independent* newspaper, which reported on the case on 24 January 1990. Nevertheless, Mr. Hall's case was looked at in considerable depth and a detailed report was forwarded by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Gentleman. From the report he will have seen that, although there was no evidence of exposure to radiation, it was necessary to postulate various situations —based on Mr. Hall's allegations in *The Independent*— from which hypothetical dose levels, together with Mr. Hall's medical records, it was possible, using the internationally accepted methodology, to calculate the radiation-induced risk—called the probability of causation—to determine the likelihood of Mr. Hall's cancer being caused by doses at those hypothetical levels.

The report to which I refer is, of necessity, rather lengthy and technical and I therefore do not intend to go into great detail during this debate as it will mean little to those who have not seen it. I can assure the House, however, that all possible hypothetical scenarios were investigated and the probability of causation assessed. In each hypothetical case, the dose levels were so low that there could be no reasonable inference of a causal link and therefore no basis for awarding compensation.

Mr. Hall, like many ex-servicemen, has been awarded a war pension by the Department of Social Security. This was from 5 October 1989, on the basis of a diagnosis of leukaemia, as the hon. Gentleman said. That is one of the varieties of leukaemia of which the NRPB report showed a small increase of incidence among test participants compared with the control group. Proof is not essential for a claim to succeed under the war pension scheme and the claimant is given the benefit of any reasonable doubt concerning attribution to service.

As I mentioned earlier, the control group itself had an unusually low incidence of these particular diseases, the differences probably being due to chance, according to the NRPB. Certainly the NRPB found no evidence of a link with radiation. However, it is not necessary to show any such link to receive a war pension. Subsequently, Mr. Hall's diagnosis has, after the issue of a war pension, been revised to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. The Department of Social Security, however, has no wish to review Mr. Hall's award of a war pension now that the diagnosis has been revised.

In conclusion, I must emhasise that the Government are ready to pay compensation wherever their legal liability is established and where there is firm evidence to show, on balance of probabilities, that ill health is being suffered as a result of participation in the test programme.

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock on Tuesday evening and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-three minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 26 February 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

FOLKESTONE HARBOUR BILL *[Lords]*

Read a Second time, and committed.

ABERDEEN HARBOUR ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

(By Order)

Considered; to be read the Third time tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Mr. Speaker: Before we start Scottish questions, I remind Members from Scottish constituencies that, as is my practice, I shall seek to call those who were not called last time and give them some preference.

Home Rule

1. **Mrs. Irene Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will meet representatives of the Scottish Constitutional Convention to discuss home rule for Scotland.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): I have no plans to meet representatives of the convention. I have already initiated public and parliamentary debate of its proposals which were discussed in considerable detail in the Scottish Grand Committee on 24 February.

Mrs. Adams: As this is likely to be the last Scottish Question Time before the general election, will the Secretary of State indulge in a deathbed conversion and recognise the frustrations and hopes of the Scottish people about the present constitutional set-up? Will he discontinue his pre-election pact with the Scottish National party in its all-or-nothing bid? Does he agree that a meeting with the convention may not be enough to save his seat but may just save his face?

Mr. Lang: I look forward to answering Scottish questions from this Dispatch Box at the first Scottish Question Time after the general election. Then, as now, I shall do my best to ensure the protection of Scotland's best interests by maintaining its place as a full, equal partner in this United Kingdom Parliament.

Mr. Marlow: As a unionist with very good reason for having the warmest of feelings towards Scotland, may I ask my right hon. Friend to make it absolutely clear to anyone who wishes to establish an institution in Scotland with legislative powers over certain areas of policy that, regrettably, it would be totally unacceptable for any Scottish Member of the House to have any say, vote or control over areas of policy in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Lang: I entirely understand my hon. Friend's anxiety on that point. It is an anxiety shared by several Labour Members, most notably the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and, more recently, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). My hon. Friend puts his finger on one of the central dilemmas faced by those who would advocate setting up a separate Parliament with separate powers entrenched in Edinburgh in rivalry to the Westminster Parliament. That is incompatible with the integrity of the United Kingdom Parliament. It would not be sustainable or stable in the long term.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that, given that after five years his Government have completely failed to establish a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, he has no credibility in the constitutional debate in Scotland because he has no proposals to make? Is not that aggravated by the fact that the Prime Minister does not know what he believes about the future of Scotland? The consequence is that the only way to secure reform is to secure the defeat of every Conservative candidate in Scotland at the general election.

Mr. Lang: We know what the leader of the Liberal Democrats thinks. He thinks that a proportional representation voting system is more important than the constitutional future of Scotland. When asked whether he would support a constitutional change in Scotland if he did not have proportional representation, he said no; so he makes it clear that he gives higher priority to the self-interest of the Liberal Democrats and a voting system that would help them than to the issue of principle on Scotland's constitutional future.

Mr. Molyneaux: In the light of the Prime Minister's speech last Saturday, will the Secretary of State consider extending the consultations to which he referred to include the leaders of all parties in the House in order to find out what common ground there might be on the possibility of decentralisation of powers common to the four component parts of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Lang: The central message delivered by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in Glasgow last Saturday was the importance of maintaining the integrity of the United Kingdom. I am sure that that is a sentiment with which the right hon. Gentleman would warmly agree. Within the integrity of the United Kingdom, the different component parts have different interests and those are already well represented and will continue to be so within the constitutional arrangements based here at Westminster.

Sir John Stokes: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, had I not been an Englishman I would have been happy to be a Scotsman and that had I been alive in the Fifteen or the Forty-five, I would have been in the field for the Stuarts? But surely the time has come to give up those illusions and to do what is best for all of us, the best for Scotland and for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend epitomises what is best in this place in that he is able to represent the interests of England and of the United Kingdom in the same way that

my right hon. and hon. Friends representing Scottish constituencies are able to advance the best interests of Scotland and of the United Kingdom. We have far more to gain from helping each other and sharing representation in this United Kingdom Parliament than we have from breaking it up, as the Labour party's proposals would do.

Mr. Dewar: The Secretary of State constantly talks of the defence of the Union. Given the confusion that has arisen as a result of the Prime Minister's remarks after his speech on Saturday, does such a defence rule out now and in future for the right hon. Gentleman and the Conservative party the setting up of any form of directly elected body covering all Scotland and drawing power from Westminster?

Mr. Lang: The muddle and confusion exist only in the mind of the hon. Gentleman. The position of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, the Government and this party is absolutely clear. We are determined to maintain Scotland's full place as an equal partner in the United Kingdom and to create no bodies which would fragment or undermine that position. We believe that Scotland has benefited enormously from her membership of the United Kingdom and we do not wish to jeopardise her place in it.

Recession

2. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet representatives of the Scottish Council (Development and Industry) to discuss the effects of the recession in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I have frequent contacts with the Scottish Council and look forward to a continuing exchange of views. I am sure that the council will have noted the consensus view of economic commentators that Scotland has been less affected by the world recession than any other part of Great Britain and that Scottish economic growth this year is likely to match or exceed that of the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Welsh: Having invited debate on self-government and having not received the answers for which he hoped, why is the Minister not listening to leaders of Scottish commerce and industry who say that we have nothing to fear and a great deal to gain from independence? As the United Kingdom's high interest rates and other policies are creating record bankruptcies and rising unemployment and making Scottish industry and commerce less competitive in European and world markets, how can he justify the continuation of those inappropriate Government policies in Scotland?

Mr. Lang: There is absolutely no doubt that the almost unanimous view of business men in Scotland is that the one thing that would undermine Scotland's economic future would be for Scotland to be cut off from the rest of the United Kingdom and reduced to a small home market of about 5 million people, driving away inward investment with higher tax rates and with a volatile currency dependent on the fluctuations of oil, with future uncertainty as to Scotland's continuing membership of the European Community. The recipe of the hon. Gentleman and his party for Scotland's future is a recipe for decline and impoverishment.

Mr. McAvoy: The Secretary of State will be aware that the co-operation of the work force at Hoover Cambuslang has been a major factor in ensuring the long-term viability of that factory. Bearing in mind the financial support that the Government have made available to Hoover plc for the factory at Cambuslang, will the Secretary of State join me in supporting the work force who are looking for assurances from Hoover plc that there will be no transfer of work from Cambuslang to any other location?

Mr. Lang: That is essentially a matter for the management and not for me. Certainly, it would be wrong for the Government to intervene in important management decisions. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for paying tribute to the fact that the Government's regional assistance policies are helping Hoover, as they have helped so many other companies in Scotland, and for the implicit acknowledgement that industrial relations have so improved under the Government that the negotiations to which he referred can take place. What a contrast with the last period of Labour Government.

Mr. Bill Walker: When my right hon. Friend meets the Scottish Council, will he draw its attention to the fact that under the SNP's proposals Scotland would lose up to about 30,000 defence-related jobs? Will he tell the council that Lossiemouth, Kinloss and Leuchars, the RAF main bases, would all close, that the Royal Marine base at Cawdor would close and that Rolls-Royce, Ferranti, GEC and others would lose their orders and Yarrows would get no orders for frigates? Consequently, Scotland would lose 30,000 jobs. What for? For separatist, socialist, nationalism.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and puts the point extremely well. In addition to what will happen to all those defence-related jobs, it is certain that the large flow of inward investment and the jobs created from that will cease. The most recent announcement of such investment—that Matsushita will create a factory in East Kilbride with £8 million investment—follows my visit to the company in Japan last autumn. That and other inward investment will dry up.

Mr. Wilson: The Secretary of State referred to the last Labour Government. I assure him that we are extremely pleased to make comparisons with that Government in terms of unemployment statistics and the support given to Scottish industry. Will he confirm that in 1976-77 some £680 million, in current terms, was paid to Scottish industry in regional assistance? Will he also confirm that last year the equivalent figure, in current terms, was less than £160 million? What immense improvement in the Scottish economy and in unemployment justifies a 75 per cent. reduction in assistance to Scottish industry when in my constituency, for instance, the official figures show that one person in seven is out of work and the unofficial figures, based on the old count, show that almost one person in five is out of work?

Mr. Lang: I will give the hon. Gentleman the comparisons. For every four companies in existence when the last Labour Government left office there are now seven. When they left office, the rate of inflation had doubled and had averaged 15 per cent. for the previous five years; the present rate is well below 5 per cent. When the last Labour Government left office, unemployment had doubled; within the past three years, employment has risen

by 150,000. Within the lifetime of this Parliament, unemployment has fallen by 100,000 and productivity has risen by more than 5 per cent. a year. Within the past three or four years, investment has reached the highest levels ever, and in four of the past five years we have achieved record output. In the past year or two, we have achieved record exports. Those are some comparisons between this Government and the last Labour Government.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. So that I am able to call more Members, may we have briefer questions? Long questions lead to long answers.

Constitutional Reform

3. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has had concerning the constitutional future of Scotland.

Mr. Lang: In the past six months, representations received about constitutional issues have comprised 141 letters or postcards, of which 55 were in favour of devolution, 39 were in favour of independence and 47 were opposed to either.

Mrs. Fyfe: In the past four days since the Prime Minister made his extraordinary remark about taking stock after the general election, has the Secretary of State for Scotland got around to clarifying what was meant by that?

Mr. Lang: The Prime Minister, like the leaders of all political parties and like all candidates in the election, will be taking stock the day afterwards. My right hon. Friend will be taking stock of the increased number of Members representing the Conservative party. A more appropriate phrase for the Opposition would be "licking wounds".

Mr. Harry Ewing: When the Secretary of State considers constitutional change, will he disregard the position of the SNP? Having listened on Monday for a fairly long time to the SNP pleading to leave the Union, I noticed that the leader of the parliamentary group, the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), could not get down to Westminster quick enough to sit beside the heir to the throne at a dinner. If that is not near the the United Kingdom establishment, I do not know what is.

Mr. Lang: Far be it from me to intervene in family squabbles between two members of two socialist parties. I content myself with standing firm on the only piece of strong ground in the constitutional argument, which represents those who believe in the maintenance of Scotland's place in the United Kingdom. That is the position to which we are committed.

The Speaker: I call Mrs. Margaret Ewing— *[Interruption.]* Order. The hon. Lady was mentioned.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Leaving aside the rather sour comments of the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing), may I ask the Secretary of State whether he believes in the Meccano engineering ideas propounded as a way to resolve the constitutional issue in Scotland—such as the Scottish Grand Committee meeting more often in Scotland, or even the Cabinet meeting in Scotland? Does not the right hon. Gentleman realise that that would be viewed by the Scots as tinkering with an unacceptable solution? Will he deal with the fundamental issue that the Scottish people have placed firmly on his doorstep, which is the need for a facility to establish the right of the Scots to self-determination?

Mr. Lang: I do not believe in tinkering with the constitution and that is where I part company with all the parties on the Opposition Benches. Whether they would deliberately break Scotland free from the remainder of the United Kingdom, which is the policy of the hon. Lady's party, or do that by degrees and in disguise, which is the policy of the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party, the end product would be the same. The only protection of Scotland's place within the United Kingdom is the sovereignty of this United Kingdom Parliament.

Mr. Adley: Although I recognise that the West Lothian question remains to be answered, some of those who have listened to the arguments for more than 20 years still find the arguments of our right hon. Friend Lord Home rather more seductive than the argument of our right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). Is not it a cause of some concern that ever since 1975 support for our party in Scotland has been declining? Has not our party always been in favour of decentralisation? When my right hon. Friend returns to office, as he will in the next Government, will he initiate some discussions that will enable us to arrive at a solution to the problem that satisfies all parties?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right to identify the principle of devolution as important to our party. That is why we devolved power from the Government to the people; that is why we devolved power from the centre to the outlying parts. However, my hon. Friend's memory of history is a little shaky. If he reflects, he may recall that after the last occasion on which the constitutional question was directly addressed in a referendum in 1979, the strength of the Scottish Conservative party rose considerably in the subsequent Parliament. In that referendum campaign, support for a devolved assembly fell from 70 per cent. at the beginning to just above 30 per cent. at the end.

Hospital Building

4. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairman of Lothian health board to discuss the hospital building programme.

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I meet health board chairmen on a regular basis and from time to time we discuss the hospital building programme, which is the biggest in the history of the national health service in Scotland.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the Minister for that statement. He is aware that the Scots want self-determination and their own Parliament——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is about Lothian health board.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker.

The Scots, especially Leithers, want democratic control of the health service. Last year, they were promised a new hospital for Leith. No brick has been laid, and I understand that the Minister has done nothing about that. If he is anxious about the Scottish dimension, will he advise the bureaucrats on the health board and in his

Department about what the people want? They certainly want a decent health service and we desperately need a hospital in Leith.

Will the Minister ensure that a clinic is established to look after HIV patients? It is no use suggesting, as I understand has been suggested, that sufferers of that disease should be shunted up a side street in my constituency. This is an emotive issue. I say to the Minister——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not fair for the hon. Member to take so long.

Mr. Brown: It is not fair on the people in my constituency——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is enough, please.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman does a disservice to the health service in Lothian, which has excellent facilities for HIV patients, and a specialist unit in Edinburgh was provided by the Government during the term of this Parliament. As to new hospitals, I am astonished that the hon. Gentleman is unaware that Lothian health board proposes to develop Leith hospital and to provide geriatric and psychogeriatric beds. Its proposals will come before Ministers shortly, although the board will have to consult on them. Does the hon. Gentleman also not know that Lothian health board plans to spend £200 million on a new teaching hospital for Edinburgh and new acute facilities? That is more than the last Labour Government spent on new building in the whole of Scotland in every year of office. The hon. Gentleman has a real nerve coming to the House to complain about Lothian health board's record, which is second to none.

Mr. Galbraith: Is not the Minister aware that the new Edinburgh teaching hospital was planned under the last Labour Government, and that it has taken 12 years for the Conservative Government to reach any decision? Is not the Minister further aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) and I have been informed that an announcement about that new hospital is being delayed until the general election campaign? Will the Minister confirm that it is part of the Government's cynicism and continuing propaganda to sit on that announcement until the election campaign begins?

Mr. Forsyth: I have no idea when the general election will be, but if the hon. Gentleman thinks that it will be held in the immediate future, Lothian health board will certainly not be in a position to present its acute strategy. I have no doubt that a Labour Government planned all sorts of things, but they were the only Government in the history of the health service to cut the health building programme. That is Labour's record. This Government have presided over the biggest health building programme in the history of the NHS. Good intentions do not treat the sick, but this Government have treated the sick.

Local Government Finance

5. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any plans to meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss financial problems of local authorities.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): As part of the normal consultation on local government finance matters, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I plan to meet the convention on 3 April.

Mr. Dunnachie: Surely all right hon. and hon. Members agree that the poll tax is the most obnoxious ever devised by man. Does not the Minister agree that the poorest and neediest—old-aged pensioners, and the unemployed—should have received a 100 per cent. guaranteed rebate since the tax started, and that those who have been forced to pay 20 per cent. of their poll tax should receive refunds?

Mr. Stewart: There is a problem of non-collection in Strathclyde, but the average 20 per cent. increase in non-collection for Scottish local authorities as a whole is mainly due to Strathclyde's 35 per cent. increase. If the hon. Gentleman wants to identify the real problem, he ought to attack the real villain, Tommy Sheridan of the Anti-Poll Tax Federation, who I believe is to stand against the hon. Gentleman. Does not the hon. Gentleman have the guts to do so?

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Lambie:

Mr. Lambie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for calling me in what will be my last Scottish Question Time after nearly 22 years' service in the House. I take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to wish you well on your retirement to another place.

Is the Minister aware that one of the unemployment and social black spots of Cunninghame is the three-towns area of Ardrossan, Saltcoats and Stevenston? As a result of prompting by the Stevenston branch of the Labour party, a three-towns initiative has been launched, involving the two Members of Parliament representing Cunninghame constituencies, Strathclyde and Cunninghame local authorities and the two relevant Members of the European Parliament? Will the Minister meet a deputation to discuss what financial help the Government can give to ensure the success of that initiative?

Mr. Stewart: If this is the hon. Gentleman's last Scottish question time, that will be a matter of regret throughout the House. The hon. Gentleman has represented his constituents with a great deal of vim, vigour and dedication; on behalf of those constituents, he has been a thorn in the flesh of successive Governments —especially Labour Governments.

The short answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is this: I understand what he has said and if he wishes to meet me to discuss that particular constituency matter, I shall of course agree.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem of local government finance in Scotland has been aggravated by those who refuse to pay the community charge? Is it not a scandal when Members of Parliament, such as the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), belong to the "can pay but won't pay" brigade? Law-makers should never become law-breakers.

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that potential law-makers cannot and should not be law-breakers.

The settlement announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scottish local authorities in the coming year is extremely generous. The original aggregate external finance settlement of 6·1 per cent. has now been

increased by an extra £6·7 million to 6·3 per cent. That figure is well ahead of the rate of inflation, and it is a more than reasonable settlement.

Mr. Maxton: When will the Minister stop hiding behind the "can't pay, won't pay" brigade, and admit that the whole chaos of the poll tax was caused by him and his supporters who instituted the tax? Does he not recognise that the poll tax will come back to haunt the Conservatives during the election campaign as next year's poll tax bills flood through the post boxes? Will he now accept that the one step that he can take to ensure an easier collection of the poll tax during its last year is to abolish the 20 per cent. minimum payment on 1 April this year, rather than waiting until next year?

Mr. Stewart: There is another hon. Member who does not attack Tommy Sheridan.

The Government's position is absolutely clear. Let me point out that the personal community charge for Lothian is to be increased by only 2·6 per cent. May I also remind the hon. Gentleman that, as far as I understand it, his policy is to bring back the rates in Scotland?

Mr. Maxton *indicated assent*——

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman nods. Good—keep nodding. He will bring back the rates in Scotland, at the levels that will operate after a Scottish revaluation. He could not do that in England. If he thinks that that will help the cause of the United Kingdom, he is making a grave error.

Labour Statistics

6. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of people in Scotland who are economically active, unemployed and not receiving unemployment benefit.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Based on the labour force survey results from 1987 to 1990 an estimated annual average of 90,000 people in Scotland fell within the International Labour Organisation definition of unemployed, but were not included in the monthly claimant count statistics. This compares with 80,000 people in the claimant count who did not fall within the ILO definition of unemployed.

Mr. Hughes: Do not the figures show the damaging effects of the Government's policy on unemployment in Scotland? Does the Minister accept that, after we have discounted the 23 fiddles on the figures that he has carried out, the true figure for unemployment in Scotland is over 350,000—110,000 more than the figure to which he officially admits? When will the Minister throw off his damaging complacency and act to remove this black spot from the Scottish economy?

Mr. Stewart: The House will recognise why the hon. Gentleman has made those somewhat uncharacteristic partisan comments. No doubt he is worried about his marginal seat. Since January 1987, unemployment in Grampian has fallen by about 13,350. It is undoubtedly the case that his area of the country has been doing extremely well economically under this Government. That cannot be denied. That is why the Conservatives will do particularly well in the north-east of Scotland in the forthcoming election.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Does the Minister accept that the figures will not be helped if the speculation about the Gartcosh recycling paper project, which appeared in this morning's press, has any accuracy at all? Would it not be a disaster if Germany succeeded where we failed? Does he also accept that unless he gives full encouragement to Dumbarton Enterprise and the Lanarkshire development agency, this project will not succeed and that Gartcosh will therefore become, for the second time, the location for a Tory industrial disaster?

Mr. Stewart: It certainly would not be helped by the prospect of a Scottish assembly. That is for certain. May I point out to the hon. Gentleman, however, because I recognise that he is representing the concerns of his constituents, that I do not comment on speculative reports. May I also underline the massive support that the Government are giving to Lanarkshire. A question appears later on the Order Paper about that. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to see me personally about that project, I shall be happy to meet him.

Mr. Oppenheim: Does my hon. Friend accept that to many people south of the border the Scots have the reputation of being hardy, robust, tough, thrifty if somewhat dour people, as borne out by the fact that there are more people in work in Scotland now than there were in 1979, that Scottish exports are far higher now than they were in 1979 and that Scottish manufacturing exports are far higher now than they were in 1979? Is it not a shame that that positive image is so often threatened by the whingeing, whining, craven attitude of so many of the Members of Parliament whom the Scots choose to send to Westminster?

Mr. Stewart: I feel that I have to disagree with my hon. Friend. I have never before been described as somewhat dour, but my hon. Friend's basic case is absolutely right. There is no doubt at all, as every commentator has confirmed, that during the present world recession the Scottish economy has been doing extremely well. We are coming through the problems extremely well in order to face the challenges of the future. That is a tribute to a very large number of people in industry, in management and in the trade union movement. My hon. Friend is right to point out that we in Scotland should be proud of our achievements.

Borders Economy

7. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to assist the prospects of the local economy in the Borders region; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Borders region benefits, along with the rest of Scotland, from the Government's firm economic policies which are aimed at further reducing inflation and reducing cost and other burdens on industry. In addition, since April of last year, Scottish Borders Enterprise has been able to bring to bear substantial public resources through integrated training, economic development and environmental activity.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does the Minister agree that the recent disturbingly high increase in the percentage rates of unemployment in the region underscore the urgent need for Government action now? Does he also agree that

because the Borders region is denied access to development assistance of any kind, either from the Treasury or from the European Community, the prospects for the local economy are damaged? Can he give an undertaking now to review urgently in the next Parliament the whole question of the criteria for eligibility for development aid status and in particular to reconsider urgently the region's claim, so that it can deal with some of its economic problems?

Mr. Stewart: It is the Government's intention to review the assisted area map in the next Parliament. I think that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that there are substantial arguments in favour of a period of stability for the boundaries of a particular assisted area. I do not underestimate the problems to which the hon. Gentleman has referred, but may I emphasise that Scottish Borders Enterprise has been doing a great deal with the support of hon. Members and others to assist the economy of the borders. For example, Scottish Borders Enterprise has provided £1 million to support the borders textiles initiative. The hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) have asked for a meeting with me to discuss the matters. I understand from my office that the date of that meeting has been agreed.

Mr. Home Robertson: Can the Minister confirm that one of the biggest handicaps for the economy of the borders and adjacent regions is the intolerably dangerous and congested A1 road? Now that the Government have figures which confirm that the A1 in my constituency is carrying as much traffic as the A74 and 35,000 people have signed a petition calling for dualling of the A1, will he confirm reports that the Government are about to concede the case for dualling? If so, will he accept that that death-bed conversion of the Government will be most welcome?

Mr. Stewart: I do not read of any commitment by the Labour party to increase expenditure on Scottish roads. Has the hon. Gentleman checked that with his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith)? There is no such commitment. The A1 steering group, which was set up by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), comprises officials of all the relevant authorities and is monitoring traffic and accidents on the A1 so that priority can be given to accident remedial action. A route action plan in respect of the A1 between Edinburgh and Newcastle is being developed. The Government's position on improvements to the A1 is clear, but there is still no commitment from the Labour party.

Sir David Steel *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Mr. McMaster.

Mr. McMaster: No. 8, Sir.

Sir David Steel: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman must take his chance on these matters. I have already called one hon. Member from his party. With the best will in the world, I cannot call every hon. Member who has a constituency interest in every question.

Sir David Steel: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I shall not take the point of order in the middle of Question Time. The right hon. Gentleman can raise it afterwards.

Sir David Steel: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I repeat to the right hon. Gentleman that I am not taking his point of order in the middle of Question Time.

Social Problems

8. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss strategies to tackle social problems.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have had useful meetings with the convention's social work committee to discuss our community care strategy and residential care. I see no reason why this should not continue for many years.

Mr. McMaster: Does the Minister recall that it was his Government which told young Scots to get on their bikes if they had no hopes and no homes? Does he realise that many thousands of young Scots took that advice and came to London, only to find cardboard homes and cardboard hopes? Will he support the campaign launched by Centrepoint today and even at this late stage, after 13 wasted years of Tory rule, take steps urgently to end the housing crisis in Scotland and to give our young people a future there?

Mr. Forsyth: It is this Government who have given young people a guarantee of a place in higher or further education or training. No other Government have done that. On housing, does the hon. Gentleman realise that the Government have spent £1 billion every year since 1989 on housing in Scotland? Is he unaware of the action which my hon. Friend took this very week when he distributed another £7·5 million to local authorities to deal with homelessness? The hon. Gentleman should recognise what the Government have done and he should also recognise that his party is promising nothing in this area.

Mr. Canavan: In view of Scottish local authority support for constitutional change, will the Minister tell us which of the Prime Minister's weekend statements he agrees with—the one on Saturday when he resolutely defended the status quo or the one on Monday morning when he was forced to admit that he would have to take stock of the situation after the general election? Bearing in mind that the majority of people in Scotland want a Scottish Parliament with legislative and economic powers, does the Minister support his Prime Minister in encouraging the people of Scotland to take the zero option by achieving a complete wipe-out of Scottish Tory Members at the next general election, including the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth)?

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman had been certain about the Labour party's prospects in Stirling, he would not have run away to Falkirk when he was the Member of Parliament for part of that area. The Prime Minister's message was clear. The hon. Gentleman has demonstrated

today that those who wish to preserve the Union with the United Kingdom have only one party to vote for at the general election and that is the Conservative party.

Mr. Worthington: Will the Minister meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities urgently to discuss the problem of mounting youth unemployment in Scotland? To use just one example, in Strathclyde there is now a shortfall of 3,700 training places. A total of 3,000 fewer training places have been offered this year than last. How can the Minister claim that the guarantee is being met when there is such a shortfall? When he meets COSLA, will he discuss Scottish Enterprise's training budget? Figures that I have obtained from Scottish Enterprise make it clear that there has been a cut of 15 per cent. overall at a time of mounting youth and adult unemployment. Nearly 20 per cent. has been cut from the training budget. There is mounting long-term unemployment——

Mr. Maclennan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Nothing out of order has occurred.

Mr. Maclennan: The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) is making a speech.

Mr. Speaker: That is up to me.

Mr. Worthington: In 1988-89 the Government cut the training budget because they said that there was falling unemployment. Why, when there is mounting unemployment, have they cut the training budget for Scottish Enterprise by 15 per cent?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman surely knows that we are spending 2·5 times as much on training as the last Labour Government. That is undeniable. The hon. Gentleman has come to the House and asked about unemployment when he is a member of a party that wishes to put a tax on jobs through its training levy, wishes to destroy employment by introducing a minimum wage and, worst of all, wishes to make Scotland the highest taxed part of the United Kingdom with its proposal for an assembly. Those policies would destroy jobs. The hon. Gentleman knows that and it is why he does not want to hear the facts.

Scotland in Europe

9. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the European Commission to discuss Scotland's role in Europe.

Mr. Lang: I met President Delors and Commissioners Millan and Brittan in Brussels in March 1991 and Commissioners MacSharry and Andriessen in Strasbourg in July 1991 to discuss issues of relevance to Scotland.

Mrs. Michie: Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the most important issues facing Scotland today is the future of the fishing industry? Will he give an undertaking to the House today that he will lead the United Kingdom delegation in the forthcoming talks on the common fisheries policy so that he can be actively involved in securing EC money for a decommissioning scheme? He must agree that fishing is a top priority. If he will not do that, it is yet another reason for us to have a Scottish Parliament to look after our own affairs.

Mr. Lang: I take a great and close interest in fishing matters and the Scottish Office has been represented at no fewer than 17 Councils of fishing and agriculture Ministers over the past three years. I believe that our changed proposals for the tying-up arrangements have been widely welcomed by the fishing industry. If a Scottish Parliament were set up in Edinburgh and took control of fisheries matters, Scotland's voice at the centre, where it matters, would be substantially diminished because responsibility would continue to reside with the United Kingdom Parliament.

Mr. Wray: Can the Secretary of State for Scotland explain to the House what would happen if Scotland were to renegotiate the terms? Would not it find itself in the same position as Greenland, which had to get permission from the Danish Parliament to clear the road? It would have to be accepted by the European Parliament. Bureaucrats in Brussels are getting ready to jackboot smaller countries by asking them to enter into a troika agreement to takeover the presidency.

Mr. Lang: Constitutional change of the kind envisaged by the Scottish National party or by the Labour party or the Liberal Democrats would undermine Scotland's access to the Commission and the European Community and our ability to represent our case there. The best prospect that Scotland has in Europe and within the United Kingdom is to remain within the United Kingdom Parliament.

Mr. Gill: Having heard the answer that my right hon. Friend gave——

Hon. Members: "Who is this?"

Mr. Speaker: Order. In a United Kingdom Parliament, the hon. Gentleman has a right to put a question.

Mr. Gill: Is there any area in which an independent Scotland would have more influence in the European Community than under the present arrangements?

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I cannot think of any.

Mallaig Road

10. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress there has been on the Fort William to Mallaig road.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): Since 1985, two major schemes worth more than £8 million have been completed on the A830. The additional funding for roads announced by the Secretary of State means that we plan to start the Morar bypass scheme in the coming financial year, 1992-93.

Sir Russell Johnston: Does the Minister agree that the exciting proposals for the development of Mallaig harbour, which are with the Scottish Office, make it urgent that the remaining sections of the road are completed as soon as possible?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I believe that this will be very good news indeed for the people of Morar. The hon. Member will be aware that Morar is famous for the northern lights, presented in the Scottish film "Local

Hero". This will mean that although there may be no oil under Morar or Morar beach, Morar and its inhabitants will soon have a new road.

Lanarkshire Economy

11. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding the Lanarkshire economy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend has received representations from a number of sources concerning the Lanarkshire economy. A large number of projects, backed by substantial additional resources, are now being undertaken through the Lanarkshire development agency to ensure the successful regeneration of Lanarkshire.

Dr. Reid: After more than 150 months of this Government and more than 100 Scottish Question Times, do the Secretary of State and his colleagues accept that this is their last opportunity to redeem themselves for the betrayal of the Scottish steel industry? Is the Minister aware that Labour has made it plain that we shall give not only technical but financial assistance to any commercially viable project for developing new technology at Ravenscraig? On this last occasion before Ministers demit office, will they give a pledge that the Government will match our pledge of financial and technical assistance for the Lanarkshire steel industry to develop thin-slab technology? If the Minister cannot give that pledge, the day after the next election they will not be taking stock but will be a laughing stock in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: I must remind the hon. Gentleman of the provisions of the treaty of Paris, which his party accepts, does it not? On the hon. Gentleman's second question about financial resources, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has decided that overall resources available to the Scottish Enterprise network for next year, subject to the approval of the House, will be increased by £9·6 million over the total that he announced last autumn. We have received reasoned representations from the district councils in Lanarkshire concerning the provision of new factories and how they can assist Lanarkshire's economic regeneration. My right hon. Friend intends to increase the resources available to those district councils by about £8 million. The hon. Gentleman will recognise that these figures show a real commitment to Lanarkshire. I do not in any way underestimate his commitment to his constituents, but when we debated these matters the Opposition Front Bench did not promise an extra penny for Lanarkshire if there were to be a Labour Government.

Mr. Dewar: One of the key agencies in the fight to strengthen the Lanarkshire economy is the Lanarkshire development agency. Will the Minister guarantee that local enterprise companies will get at least as much money next year in real terms as they are getting in the current year? Does he accept that today's announcement about the Scottish Enterprise budget for 1992-93 will be seen as election window dressing? Will he confirm that the Scottish Office is finding only an additional £1 million from its own resources and that its contribution to Scottish Enterprise will fall next year by almost £15 million?

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman shows his customary predilection for turning good news into misery at every possible opportunity. I repeat the figures: my right hon. Friend has announced that the resources available to the Scottish Enterprise network are being increased to £462·6 million, an increase of £9·6 million on the total announced last autumn. It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman gave no commitment that the resources would be increased if there were a Labour Government. Indeed, he has not denied that the resources might even be reduced if there were a Labour Government.

Constitutional Reform

12. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to make changes to the current structure of government in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The Government are consulting at present on possible changes to the structure of local government in Scotland.

Mr. Watson: If the Secretary of State believes what he has recently been saying about the constitutional issue in Scotland, he is gravely mistaken. He is only human and we all make mistakes from time to time, but the key is whether we learn from them. The Secretary of State has consistently refused to learn from his often-repeated mistake of assuming that he knows what is best for the people of Scotland and that they do not. Let me spell out what they have been saying to him in opinion polls for some time—the status quo is not an option. The Prime Minister appears to have grasped that fact, as have some of his parliamentary candidates, so when will the Secretary of State grasp it and enter the real world of Scottish politics?

Mr. Lang: If the hon. Gentleman believes that Scotland's future is not to remain within the United Kingdom Parliament, he had better stand up and say so and then join a party which represents that view.

Teacher Training

13. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to bring the teacher training programme in Scotland into line with that applying in England.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The teacher training reforms in England will bring practice near to that followed at present in Scotland. As part of a review, a pilot which will provide even more school-based training for secondary teachers will be carried out by Moray House college of education.

Mr. Steen: Does the Secretary of State agree that the importance of teacher training is such that more time should be spent with children and chalk rather than ideological and philosophical lectures? Does he agree that he should tell the Secretary of State for Education and Science that it would be best to follow the two-year probationary procedure in England because it is well known in Scotland to produce excellent teachers? Does he also agree that the experiments being carried out in Moray House and its excellent record are second to none?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with much of what my hon. Friend says. I make it clear to the House that in Scotland it has been the practice for teacher training to be much more classroom based and I should like to see further progress in that respect. I agree that people south of the border can learn from what has been achieved there.

Farming and Crofting

14. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to meet the chairman of the National Farmers Union of Scotland to discuss the future of farming and crofting.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend expects to meet the president of the National Farmers Union on 5 March at its annual conference. My noble Friend the Minister responsible for agriculture in Scotland and I will also be present.

Mr. Maclennan: Is the Minister aware that farm incomes in Scotland in the past five years have fallen by 47 per cent. and in the past year by 38·5 per cent? As he approaches the negotiations for reform of the common agricultural policy, what steps will Scottish Ministers take to reverse that trend?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman is right to point out the serious decline that has taken place in farm incomes and right to underline the importance of the negotiations on CAP reform. It is vital that the discriminatory proposals emanating from Commissioner MacSharry should be resisted. They would be a disaster for Scottish farming and the Government will fight them every inch of the way.

Housing Investment

15. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to stimulate housing investment in Edinburgh.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Edinburgh district council's provisional housing capital allocations for 1992-93 total over £53 million. In addition, I understand that Scottish Homes plans to spend over £24 million in Edinburgh in 1992-93.

Mr. Strang: Is the Minister aware that these changes are trivial compared with the hundreds of millions of pounds of Government support for housing which Edinburgh and other Scottish cities have lost as a result of changes in policy introduced by the Conservative party over the past 12 years? Edinburgh faces a desperate housing crisis. When will the Government face up to that? Surely, as a Member representing Edinburgh, the Minister appreciates that hundreds of families are suffering as a result of the desperate shortage of homes to let there.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The last Labour Government enormously reduced capital allocations for housing. In the accounts sent in by Edinburgh district council—a Labour-controlled body—the £45 million that it would cost to complete the backlog was missed out. We are now sorting that out; we have made an allocation of £12·9 million and we will fully consider Edinburgh's claims when we make the final allocations in early March.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, of which I have given the relevant Member notice. Has the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) asked leave to make a personal statement about the misstatements that he made at column 163 during last week's health questions regarding cataract operations in Bath? Those statements have been corrected today in *The Times*. They were wholly misleading, and it is quite wrong that *Hansard* should contain mistakes of that nature.

Mr. Speaker: I have not had any request of that sort——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Nor am I responsible for answers given at Question Time.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I will take Sir David Steel.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hope that you will take it as a kindly gesture on the eve of your retirement if I offer you a map of Scotland. I happen to be one of only two Members representing the Borders region, yet you called a Member from outside that area earlier. I do not object to that, but, given that I was referred to in the Minister's answer, I do think I might have been called.

Mr. Speaker: I know that, but I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will understand that I had to have regard to the fact that his hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) had Question 14. At Scottish questions I try to get at least to Question 15, which we just achieved today. If I called every hon. Member with a constituency interest, on Question 4, for instance, I would have had to call about half a dozen from the Lothian region. It is just not possible.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As it now seems to be in order to complain, may I tell you that after 26 years in this House this was my last chance to have a say in Scottish Question Time. So I was surprised that you did not call me, given that I am one of the senior Members here and I made every endeavour to catch your eye. I wish you well in your retirement, but I am disappointed that I did not have the opportunity to be called on this occasion.

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry too. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to come and have a glass of Scottish wine with me some time.

Several Hon. Members *rose—[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Did you call Question 16 as the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) shouted:

"On a point of order"?

I thought that I heard you call Question 16.

Mr. Speaker: Actually, I did not. I had hoped to be able to do so, but my eye was caught by 3:31 on the clock, so it was not possible.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May I assure you, Mr. Speaker, that my point of order is not prompted by the very generous offer that you have just made? Many of us expected that it might have been made more widely, but never mind.

I raise a matter with you as guardian of the interests of all hon. Members. Officials of the British and Indian Governments are negotiating an extradition treaty. I am advised that the conclusion of a treaty is an act of state, but that, if the international obligations of such a treaty are to be capable of being enforced in the courts of this country, there must be an amendment to an existing Act of Parliament or statutory instrument giving effect to the provisions of any treaty.

As an extradition treaty between this country and India would have profound political repercussions, may I ask you to make inquiries into the matter to assure the House that, if such a treaty is signed, all hon. Members will have a proper opportunity to consider and debate the matter before any treaty is signed and before Parliament is dissolved?

Mr. Speaker: I am not aware of what the hon. Gentleman is alleging. I will certainly look into the matter —although it is, of course, a matter for the Government and not for me.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I refer to a disturbing report in *The Guardian* this morning, which was headed: "Ford switch to Germany may cost 1,200 UK jobs"?

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is the point. The report says "may". It is a hypothetical question and not a matter of order for me now.

Mr. Clarke: With respect, the report says that Ford has confirmed that a study is taking place. My question——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should raise the matter with the Government tomorrow at business questions, when he may well get an answer. Reports of discussions that may be about to take place are not a matter of order for me.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): May I draw to your attention, Mr. Speaker, the fact that I was not called at the last Scottish Question Time and that today, although I stood up for seven separate questions, I was yet again not called? This is a day for not being served. In the light of your offer to my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie), may I say that my constituency is the home of Scotch whisky—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Indeed. Speaker's Choice whisky is based in Dumbarton. In the light of your treatment of me today, any potential offer of whisky on my part will be withdrawn.

Mr. Speaker: I was about to say to the hon. Gentleman that he was welcome to come as well, but could he kindly bring a sample with him?

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I wonder whether you can satisfy my curiosity——

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Let us get on with it. That is hypothetical too.

Mr. Winnick: You will know that there is invariably a Government statement on Opposition days. Sometimes you decide to limit the exchanges. Why is it that, whenever there is a Government motion down for debate, as there is today, there is never a statement? Is there any link?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me. A large number of hon. Members wish to participate in the debate. Of course, the Opposition will seek to amend the Government's motion, so we shall debate that.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Earlier, during Scottish Question Time, the Minister, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), falsely accused me of moving my parliamentary base from Stirling to Falkirk. I have never in my parliamentary history had the privilege of representing the people of Stirling. The hon. Gentleman who made that false accusation will soon be deprived of that privilege.

Mr. Speaker: On that note, we shall move on to the ballot for notices of motions.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 13 MARCH

Members successful in the ballot were:

Sir Michael Neubert
Mr. Ray Powell
Mr. Andrew Rowe

BILL PRESENTED

HARE COURSING

Mr. Harry Cohen, supported by Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Harry Barnes, Mrs. Rosie Barnes, Mr. Gerald Bermingham, Mr. Andrew Bowden, Mr. Peter Griffiths, Mr. Doug Hoyle, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. Steve Norris, Mr. Robin Squire and Mr. Andrew Welsh, presented a Bill to make hare coursing illegal: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday next and to be printed. [Bill 92.]

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 97(1) (Matters relating exclusively to Scotland).

That the Matter of the constitutional implications for Scotland of a Scottish Parliament, being a Matter relating exclusively to Scotland, be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee for its consideration.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

Question agreed to.

Elimination of Poverty in Retirement

3.40 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require local authorities and health authorities to monitor the condition of their retired population; to eliminate standing charges on gas, electricity and water; to exempt pensioners from licence charges and telephone rental; to extend pensioners' concessionary fare schemes; to make provision for the calculation of old age pensions by reference to average earnings; and to appoint a Minister with responsibility for retired people.

This is the eighth time that I have tried to introduce the Bill. On every occasion, I have been given permission to bring in the Bill, but it has been subsequently blocked by a Tory Whip muttering, "Object," in a guilty whisper, because the Government are not prepared to debate the issue.

The Bill would make life far better for the 10 million people in this country who are retired, who have made a great contribution to our society and who have given us the standard of living that we currently enjoy. We should treat them with dignity and respect in retirement, instead of the poverty in which so many of them must live.

The old-age pension was first introduced not by the munificence of the then Liberal Government but by the demands of trade unions and ordinary people that the state should provide a decent old-age pension for people who had given a lifetime of work, whether at home, in a factory or wherever else. Now, after 12 years of this Government, from 1 April the old-age pension will be £54·80 per week. It should be £71·80 per week. For a married couple, the pension will be £86·70 per week. It should be £114·70 a week. In other words, pensioners have had £17·65 a week stolen by the break of the link with earnings in 1980 and the substitution of the link with prices. Likewise, the married couple's pension has been reduced by £28 per week.

The Government claim that there has been a 36 per cent. increase in the incomes of pensioner families during their term of office. That is simply and absolutely untrue for the majority of pensioners. In 1979, only 14 per cent. of households were below 50 per cent. of average national income. By 1988, that figure had more than doubled, to 38 per cent. It is a measure of the Government's record that pensioners are getting historically low pensions, historically living in greater poverty and historically having greater difficulties surviving because the Government's strategy is continually to reduce the level of state benefit and state old-age pension in favour of private pension schemes and private insurance schemes.

From investigations into the scandal of the Maxwell and *Mirror* pension funds, one can see the security and safety of investing money in a casino economy when pensioners should be guaranteed a decent state pension in retirement and not have to rely on the vagaries of the stock market.

The link with retail prices introduced by the Government in 1980 is a double con. It is a con because retail prices have risen less quickly than earnings, but it is a double con because research shows that the index for pensioners is considerably different from the price index for the rest of the population. For example, in the third quarter of 1991 the Government told us that retail prices for all items increased by 4·8 per cent. However, the increase in prices paid by pensioner households, who tend to spend more on fuel and other such items, was 7·2 per cent. That is not reflected in the state old-age pension.

In other words, if we add up all the money that has been stolen from pensioners in the past 12 years, we find an annual theft of more than £5 billion from pensioner households. That has been handed out in tax relief to the very rich in our society. That is a measure of the contempt in which the Government hold those who served the community so well during their working life.

Likewise, the change in the system of the state earnings-related pension scheme has taken £2 billion from Government income. Again, that is money which has gone into the private sector. We want an understanding that people who have worked during their lives, be it in their home, their factory or wherever, deserve to be paid a decent state pension during retirement. *[Interruption.]* If that is more than Conservative Members can cope with, they are welcome to leave.

My Bill makes eight proposals in all. They are straightforward and simple. The first is an immediate restoration of the link between the state old-age pension and average earnings, which was broken in 1980. That will restore the money that has been stolen from pensioners in the past 12 years. The second is that, during the lifetime of a Parliament, we should make the state old-age pension half average earnings for a couple and a third for a single pensioner. That would be a considerable increase and would bring us roughly in line with the average rate of old-age pension in comparable industrial economies around the world.

If other countries can pay such levels of pension, it can be done in Britain. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may call out, "Where will the money come from?" I can think of an awful lot of sources. First, we could restore a fair system of taxation to replace the unfair system from which the rich have gained more than £25 billion in tax handouts in the past 12 years. The £24 billion-a-year arms bill would also be a useful source of money to increase the standard of living of old-age pensioners.

The third proposal is to ensure serious co-ordination of Government policy as it affects pensioners. There should be a Minister whose job is to co-ordinate that policy, because pensioners require not only a decent level of state old-age pension, but access to luncheon clubs and day centres. They require home carers, a decent health service, a decent transport service and access to facilities such as libraries and adult education. Retirement should not be the end of life. It should be a period of enjoyment and development, not the misery of worrying about how one is to make ends meet.

The fourth and fifth proposals of the Bill are that every health authority should be required to make a public annual report on what facilities it makes available to pensioner households within its district. I often feel that the health needs of pensioners, whether for chiropody services, stress clinics or other special services that pensioners might need, are often forgotten because pensioners are not so able and articulate a lobby as some of the more professional groups who represent the better-off in our community. Such a report would at least analyse what facilities were available. It would also analyse the causes of death and rates of death through hypothermia and all the other injustices that occur in our society.

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

My fifth proposal is that local authorities should likewise be required to produce an annual report on the services they provide for the elderly. It would show that, increasingly in the past few years, local authorities have sought to charge for home carers who come into pensioners' homes. They have done so because they have had to make financial cuts.

Local authorities have had to restrict library opening hours, cut the numbers going to luncheon clubs and cut adult education and many social facilities, including such crucial things as holidays.

An annual report would not solve all those problems, but at least it would force local authorities to recognise the importance of their services to pensioner households.

The sixth proposal will find general favour. It is generally recognised that a poll tax is an unfair form of taxation, and that is why the Government are abolishing it. The imposition of standing charges for gas, electricity, telephone, water, and television licences is unfair on pensioner households. I propose that they should be abolished so that such households would pay less for gas and electricity. There would be an absolute prohibition on the disconnection of services to those households. Last year, 370 deaths were recorded as a result of hypothermia. I think that that was an understatement of the case, because many coroners and doctors are reluctant to put hypothermia as the cause on death certificates.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) tried to introduce the seventh proposal early in 1987, but it was tragically defeated when the Government brought in the payroll vote. Its aim was to provide free television licences for pensioners. Television is normal, and I do not understand why pensioners should be expected to pay for such licences.

The final proposal is on concessionary fares and free-fare schemes. London pensioners enjoy free fares because the Greater London council introduced that scheme, and even this Government have been forced to maintain the system. I propose that such a scheme should be introduced throughout the country.

The Bill will dramatically improve the lot of pensioners, and I look forward to the support of the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Mr. Harry Barnes, Mr. David Winnick, Mr. Harry Cohen, Mr. Tony Benn, Mr. Dave Nellist, Mrs. Audrey Wise, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Ms. Dawn Primarolo, Mr. Tony Banks and Mr. Bernie Grant.

ELIMINATION OF POVERTY IN RETIREMENT

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn accordingly presented a Bill to require local authorities and health authorities to monitor the condition of their retired population; to eliminate standing charges on gas, electricity and water; to exempt pensioners from licence charges and telephone rental; to extend pensioners' concessionary fare schemes to make provision for the calculation of old age pensions by reference to average earnings; and to appoint a Minister with responsibility for retired people: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday next and to be printed. [Bill 93].

Inflation

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. Although I do not propose to put a 10-minute limit on speeches, I hope that hon. Members who are called early in the debate will set a good example by speaking for not more than 10 minutes; then all hon. Members who wish to participate will be called.

3.53 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. David Mellor): I beg to move,

That this House congratulates the Government on its prudent economic policies, which have led to a substantial reduction in inflation; notes that the level of inflation in the United Kingdom has been half that under the previous Government, is now below the average for the European Community and close to the level in Germany; notes further that low inflation is essential to a sustained recovery in output and employment; and draws attention to the policies of Her Majesty's Opposition, which would inevitably lead to higher inflation, higher interest rates and higher unemployment.

If anyone wants to know what a Labour Government would be like, the last 10 minutes were an entertaining trailer. It should have come with a Government health warning.

The control of inflation is the cornerstone of Government economic policy. It is not some dogmatic genuflection to an empty shrine, but absolutely central to the prosperity of our country. What is at stake when one debates inflation is fundamental. I cannot improve on the formulation of Sir Brian Corby, the president of the Confederation of British Industry in a speech towards the end of last year. Speaking about what is at stake, he said:

"We have a genuine prospect of a stable economic climate based on low inflation in the 1990s. We should not be complacent about it. Our success will hinge on squeezing out the pervasive inflationary psychology at all levels of the economy and society."

In advocating the control of inflation, one is advocating a priority not for Government but for business, and a priority to which all business organisations subscribe. It is a sensible priority for the individual and for people on fixed incomes whose savings were ravaged by inflation in the 1970s. It is a priority for every family in the country, as one statistic drawn from the 1970s can prove. During the lifetime of the last Labour Government, money wages doubled, but the real take-home pay of the average family did not increase at all as a result of the pernicious combination of high inflation and high taxation. There is no reason to think that the combination would be any different under a future Labour Government.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): What about unemployment?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) will agree that Whips should give a lead in good behaviour.

Mr. Mellor: It is rather an honour to be barracked by the oldest hooligan in the business.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): One of the classic definitions of the cause of inflation is that it occurs when too much money is chasing too few goods. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman recognise that the danger for the 1990s is that the fall in production, especially in manufacturing, and the fall of almost 35 per

cent. in two successive years in fixed capital formation, could mean that inflation could return, not because people are being paid too much but because his Government and their policies are destroying the productive side of the economy?

Mr. Mellor: Far from it. The very people who manufacture implore the Government and would implore a Labour Government, if there were to be one, to create a stable price environment in which they can compete. The record shows a 5 per cent. increase in exports to the European Community over the past 12 months. Even in 1991, a year of recession, our share of world trade in manufactures increased for the third year running. That shows what manufacturers can do in a stable environment.

I stress again that the argument for the control of inflation is fundamental to all that organised British business says when it speaks and makes representations to the Government. The cost to business of getting it wrong is enormous. In a speech a few months ago, Sir John Banham said:

"We must redouble our efforts to squeeze inflation out of our economy, which costs business some £5 billion for each percentage point every year."

That is the cost to business of getting the decisions wrong.

It is a sign of success, a sign that we have the climate for recovery in this country, that inflation has fallen sharply to stand this month at 4·1 per cent., which is within a tenth of a percentage point of German rates. I am always keen to encourage the active participation of Opposition Members. Can any of them say at what time during the term of the last Labour Government inflation was within a tenth of a percentage point of German rates?

There can be no answer, because, in 1975, inflation in Britain was 24·2 per cent. and in Germany it was 5·9 per cent. In 1976, inflation in Britain was 16·5 per cent. and in Germany it was 4·3 per cent. The figures for 1977 are 15·8 per cent. in Britain and 3·8 per cent. in Germany. Even after the beneficial impact of the International Monetary Fund, the figures in 1978 were 8·3 per cent. in Britain and 2·6 per cent. in Germany.

Today this country has a competitive climate that did not exist and never looked like existing when Labour was in office. Our inflation rate is now almost 1 per cent. below the European Community average. Producer prices on the best measure—that is, manufacturing output excluding food, drink and tobacco—are 3·1 per cent., the lowest for a quarter of a century. Indeed, the three-month on three-month rate of producer prices is down to an annual rate of 2·2 per cent.

In other words, an era of stable prices against which British industry can perform and out-perform the best in Europe and in the world is available to us. We have a low-strike economy in which people can have sensible wage increases and which can deliver low inflation and a real increase in living standards—rather than funny money chasing massively inflated prices, as happened in the 1970s. That is the difference between the record of this Government and the alternative offered by the Labour party.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): If we are in the competitive state that the right hon. and learned Gentleman claims, why is it that Britain is now in the second major recession since the Government took office in 1979? Why have tens of thousands of small businesses in the west midlands and elsewhere collapsed in recent times? Why is there such an economic climate that the Government, understandably, have been reluctant to go to the country? When will the Government tell us when unemployment will fall—or will we have to wait until 9 April to elect a Government who will be determined to restore full employment?

Mr. Mellor: In what appears to be the hon. Gentleman's new conversion to the market economy, he must know that there are cycles. He also knows that the key question is who best provides the right climate for recovery. He knows that there are now many more businesses in Britain than there were in 1979. Before the hon. Gentleman, in his inimitable way, reduces this to the lowest common denominator of debate, can he tell us what he would be saying if he were a member of Congress?

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North) *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I note that the hon. Gentleman has been joined by the public school tendency. It is a pernicious combination that is beginning to make me fearful. What would an economic debate be without an intervention from the hon. Gentleman? It is Don Quixote without Sancho Panza.

Mr. Radice: If the battle against inflation is so important, why have we had to win it twice?

Mr. Mellor: If I were the hon. Gentleman's parent, I would be terribly worried about having spent all that money on his education simply to have him raise points like that. I never had that much spent on my education, but I can answer the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Radice: Answer, then.

Mr. Mellor: I am about to do so.

The average level of inflation in Britain in the 1980s was 6·5 per cent., and in the 1970s it was 13·7 per cent. The increase in inflation to a peak of 10 per cent. two years ago was nothing compared with the record of 25 per cent. under the previous Labour Government, when the hon. Gentleman complacently sat on his bottom and supported them through thick and thin. If he wants to know about records, I am happy to compare them. To quote the 1970s actually flatters the Labour party, because its record of 13·7 per cent. degrades to 15·5 per cent. if only the Labour years are counted.

Let us return to the example of Germany—traditionally the strongest economy in Europe. In the 1970s, the average differential between our inflation rate and Germany's was 8·6 per cent. Under this Government, that has been cut to within one tenth of a percentage point. In the 1970s, our inflation rate was more than 4 percentage points worse that that of France, 3 percentage points worse than the European Community average and only 0·3 percentage points better than that of Italy. In the 1980s, we were 0·2 percentage points better than France, 0·3 percentage points better than the European average and 3·3 percentage points better than Italy.

If we are an exporting nation—surely we can agree with Opposition Members on that at least—it must be acknowledged that the climate for exports is enormously improved as a result of that reduction in inflation. The buoyancy of British exports to the European Community, which have increased sharply in volume and value even in the last three years, is a classic example of the improvements that have occurred.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does not the Chief Secretary acknowledge that the greatest reduction in inflation has taken place at a time of deep recession? If recovery arrives, how does he expect that inflation will be controlled? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman hope that, by that time, the United Kingdom will be a member of a single currency union—recovery may well take that long—and that it will then be controlled by an independent European central bank?

Mr. Mellor: There is no reason to believe that the policies that have brought a reduction in inflation to levels that could not have been countenanced in the 1970s will not continue to provide a stable basis for prices ahead. That is not just the Government's case but what others say. Professor MacWilliams of the Confederation of British Industry said in his new year message:

"An end to uncertainty about economic policy would come if the election gives a mandate for a free-market, low-inflation economy, which would help boost business and financial confidence and unblock delayed investment decisions in the second half of 1992. Clearly, though, a change in Government would prolong the uncertainty."

Professor MacWilliams said also:

"Perhaps the best news for 1992 is the prospect of low inflation, which may hit 3 per cent. and stay close to that level. Pay settlements down to half the level of a year ago and productivity growth rising to 6 per cent. make this sustainable."

That is the climate for recovery and low inflation. I do not know that that is on offer from either of the main Opposition parties.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that we must go back to the Macmillan Government of the 1950s to find a full year in which Britain last had stable prices? Given the good news about inflation that my right hon. and learned Friend gave the House this afternoon, does he agree that, if we stick within the disciplines of the exchange rate mechanism, stable prices could once again be within sight?

Mr. Mellor: I am sure that stable prices are more in sight now than they have been for a long time—and they will remain so, if there is adherence to the policies that brought them about.

The reaction of Labour Members has been to snipe and to sneer or to hold conversations among themselves when inflation is debated. For instance, I could not help tuning in the other evening, on 13 February, to "The World Tonight", on which it was put to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) that inflation had sharply improved. He replied:

"That's not true. Inflation has risen in the last two months, and it is something that this Government has failed to deal with adequately."

The following day, inflation fell from 4·5 per cent. to 4·1 per cent.

It is astonishing that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East and Labour as a whole believe that there is a point to be made about marginal variations in inflation of well under one percentage point, against Labour's record. That is a desperate attempt to discredit our achievements. They will be telling us next that low inflation poses a wicked and evil threat to those on index-linked pensions.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): We are always keen to give the Government credit for what they have done. Did the Chief Secretary see Sir Alan Walters's appearance on television about the same time? He was asked to give his reasons for the recession and to apportion blame. He said that it was due 30 per cent. to the world recession and 70 per cent. to the Government's irresponsible mismanagement of the economy. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree?

Mr. Mellor: Is Professor Walters now an adviser to the Labour party? To what other views of his does Labour adhere? I will not join the ancient arguments between Professor Walters and one or two others with whom he disagrees. Chancellor Kohl, after three sucessive quarters in which Germany's gross domestic product has fallen, does not think that the recession was made in Downing street—and it was not much use to President Bush to suggest such a thing in the New Hampshire primary. We ought to be having a sensible debate about how Britain should move towards recovery.

It will not have escaped the hon. Gentleman's notice that the London business school recently forecast a growth of nearly 2 per cent. in the British economy this year, and I suspect that other forecasts will point clearly to a recovery this year. The question that Labour must answer, rather than making silly debating points, is what Labour policy would do to inhibit such a recovery from taking place.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Will the Chief Secretary give way?

Mr. Mellor: No, I am going to push on.

I am glad that the Leader of the Opposition is with us. Although I do not suppose that a greater torrent of words has ever been unleashed in the history of human civilisation than by the right hon. Gentleman, it is not easy to find much that he has had to say on the subject of inflation. I have had his conference speeches from 1983 analysed—I could not bear to read them all myself. Is it not interesting that, while everyone agrees that the fundamental issue for the British economy is inflation—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members become worried as soon as the Leader of the Opposition is mentioned.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that you agree that it would be a gross constitutional impropriety if the researches mentioned by the Chief Secretary were carried out by civil servants and paid for by the taxpayer. Will the Chief Secretary take this opportunity of confirming that all the studies were carried out by Conservative central office—paid for, presumably, by business men overseas, and not by the taxpayer?

Mr. Speaker: It is not a matter for me, but I did not hear the Chief Secretary say that.

Mr. Mellor: I assure the hon. Gentleman that that is the case. I trust that the use of photocopying facilities in the House by the Labour party is equally subject to his scrutiny, given that he is so censorious.

Let us come to the point. It is beyond denial that the most fundamentally important factor for the success of British industry is low inflation; yet, in his party conference speeches between 1983 and 1988, the Leader of the Opposition did not mention the word "inflation" once. Between 1989 and 1991, he mentioned it only in the context of cheap debating points about the Government's record. Nary a word—*[Interruption.]* I am glad that the

Leader of the Opposition is in such a good mood. Perhaps he is in a good enough mood to remember the occasion when, in answer to a question about how Labour would tackle inflation, he told *The Evening Standard*—it was published on 26 May 1989—

"To cut a long story short, we don't know."

I am sure that an offence against the Trade Descriptions Act has been committed here. When did the right hon. Gentleman ever cut a long story short?

The information that Labour has no policy on inflation, however, did not constitute a breach of the Official Secrets Act; that has been well known for some time. Lest Labour Members consider this a subject for amusement, and merely a Tory point, let me add that Labour's supporters have been equally nervous about its inability to come up with a sensible and comprehensive policy on inflation.

What about Mr. Ian Aitken, as Labour-inclined a journalist as can be found in this place? Everyone has heard of him. We usually hear hon. Members ask, "Who?" at this point, but no one has done so on this occasion, so I must be talking about someone who is well known to all Opposition Members. In December, Mr. Aitken referred to

"a comprehensive economic policy, capable of answering one very simple question—'what would you do about inflation?' There is, in short, a void at the heart of Labour's economic policy".

What is the answer to that question—posed 15 months ago in *The Guardian*, which is read by most right hon. and hon. Members opposite?

When is the answer going to come? Does the Labour party seriously think that it will be able to get through the election without providing an answer? The Labour party has had years to think about it. There is going to be a frantic scramble to produce a document before the election. That is not in keeping with the Labour party's reputation as a solid group of citizens who are only too ready to show the public how much they have changed and how ready they are for the burdens of office.

It is perfectly obvious, when one looks at what Labour has said about inflation, that it does not understand it in the slightest degree. The Labour party thinks that the battle against inflation has been the cause of the nation's problems rather than the sine qua non of resolving them. It has opposed every measure that has brought inflation down, and it shows genuine resentment at the success of our policy to do so. It is apparent that the Leader of the Opposition was only too happy, in his days as a wild opponent of what the Government were doing, to stoke up rather than reverse the inflation of the 1970s. He was a particularly wild opponent of the International Monetary Fund and of the measures that were taken to bring control to the British economy.

Mr. Grocott: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Mellor: No. The hon. Gentleman has blown it with a phoney point of order. I cannot believe that his IQ has increased markedly in the last 10 minutes.

Mr. Grocott: Will the right hon. and learned Member give way?

Mr. Mellor: No. I have already said that I do not intend to give way to the hon. Gentleman under any circumstances whatsoever.

Mr. Grocott *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Does the Minister intend to give way?

Mr. Mellor: No.

Mr. Speaker: If the Minister does not give way, the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) must resume his seat.

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman had his chance to exercise his larynx and he abused it, so as far as I am concerned that is it.

Mr. Haynes: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Mellor: Very well.

Mr. Haynes: Will the Minister now compare the unemployment figures of the 1990s with those of the 1970s and 1980s? Will he also compare the crime figures of the 1990s with those of the 1970s and 1980s? He was in the Home Office when they were rocketing. The right hon. and learned Gentleman made particular reference to inflation and to the comparisons that could be drawn. How about unemployment and crime that I am now asking him to compare?

Mr. Mellor *rose*——

Mr. Haynes: Wait a minute; I have not finished yet. The Minister will be aware that I shall be leaving this Chamber —[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—to go upstairs to a Committee to do some work there. I am glad that the Minister has given way to me, but instead of me walking out he will be kicked out.

Mr. Mellor: I do not sense that Opposition Front-Bench Members think that the Labour party is going to make a gain in Putney. It has not done very well there for 13 years.

Mr. Grocott *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Grocott: The Minister is being selective in giving way.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister may have been selective but he does not intend to give way. Let us get on quietly.

Mr. Mellor: I intend to deal with the point made by the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes).

Mr. Haynes: Two points.

Mr. Mellor: All right, two points. The first one is that, under the last Labour Government, unemployment doubled. *[Laughter.]* Oh, yes, it did, and it was not a laughing matter. The other point is that the only sensible comparisons are contemporary experience in other countries. Germany has the highest unemployment rate since the Weimar republic. Yesterday, General Motors declared 74,000 redundancies in the United States, and unemployment in France has consistently been higher than unemployment in the United Kingdom during the last five years.

Mr. Haynes: What about the crime figures? Will the Minister say something about them?

Mr. Mellor: No. I have left the Home Office, so I do not intend to deal with the crime figures—not that there is not an answer.

It is wrong to lay all the blame for Labour's inability to mount a coherent policy on inflation on the Leader of the Opposition. That is, after all, why he has a shadow Chancellor. If one looks back at the uncomfortable week——

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Mellor: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman can contain himself, I am about to come to him. *[Interruption.]* The Chancellor is working on the Budget. He has got something substantial to do, as one would expect. The privilege of listening to me is afforded to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. If he did so, I would sit down much more quickly. He did not have a very good week last week. We learned that some of the natives are getting restless with his supposed moderation, which is not delivering the goods. One minute he is the monarch of the glens; the next some of his colleagues are itching for Scottish devolution so that he can become an immigration officer on one of the less salubrious parts of Hadrian's wall.

The surprising thing is not that the right hon. and learned Gentleman was criticised last week, but how he has escaped criticism for so long, when one considers how long the Labour party has had to come to terms with inflation and how persistently difficult, irresponsible and wrong the right hon. and learned Gentleman has been about the issue. For instance, he always advocates taking the easy way out, the 1 per cent. reduction in interest rates whenever the subject comes up, or investment and training as the answer to everything.

It is what one might call the policy of the parrot house—"One per cent. off, pretty polly, pretty polly"; or, "Investment and training, quack quack, quack quack." Where lies the substance behind the solutions that the right hon. and learned Gentleman suggests? When will we have from the Opposition a coherent policy on inflation? *[Interruption.]* I am under the illusion that I am in the Cabinet; certainly I have a strong conviction that Opposition Members will not be.

Mr. Grocott *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I am fed up with the hon. Gentleman. I am not giving way to him, come hell or high water. I have already made that clear.

Mr. Grocott *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: He has had his chance, and it is becoming disruptive.

Mr. Grocott *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman made a bogus point of order and he is now trying to disrupt my speech. I have told him that I am not giving way. If he wishes to try to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he may do so.

Sir Ian Stewart (Hertfordshire, North): When my right hon. and learned Friend was suggesting that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), the shadow Chancellor, had had a bad week last week, had he noticed that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has not even been allowed to sign the Opposition amendment?

Mr. Mellor: In the Kremlin, that was usually a bad sign. I do not know what the position is in the Labour party. Perhaps we shall be told. Watch this space, literally and metaphorically.

Mr. Wray *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: No, I am pushing on. However, I note the hon. Gentleman's application for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's job.

In 1987-88, when, as we now know, interest rates were almost certainly too low, both the Leader of the Opposition and the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East were calling in the most intemperate terms for interest rates to be further reduced. The fact is that the Labour party subscribed to a range of policies directly designed to put inflation up.

Let us take its minimum wage policy. It is guaranteed to put up inflation and costs. The other day, the *Daily Express* did a survey of 30 companies, only two of which thought that they could cope with the minimum wage without it sharply affecting their business, costs and prices. There is a problem with the Opposition. They become boring and predictable. I thought to myself that the very mention of the *Daily Express* would have the Opposition cackling and falling about.

The most prominent company mentioned in the *Daily Express* survey was Grand Metropolitan plc, a reputable, substantial British company, employing thousands and thousands of people, many of them constituents of Opposition Members. So I got in touch with Grand Met to see whether it had been traduced by the *Daily Express*. On only one example of its activities, the managed pub business, Grand Met has costed the combined impact of the minimum wage and atypical workers' directives at £15 million a year.

That is the reality of the impact of the minimum wage. *[Interruption.]* Ah, we have the derisive laugh now. One can always tell when Labour is getting desperate. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) starts laughing unconvincingly. It is not very funny. I dare say that some of those pubs are in his constituency, and that some of his constituents drink in them. They will find the price of their beer going up as a result of the Labour party's nonsense.

Mr. Grocott: The right hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Sir I. Stewart) was concerned about who signed the amendment in the absence of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). Is it in order for the Chief Secretary to speak in support of the Government motion when he has not signed it?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): If it were not in order, he would not have been called.

Mr. Mellor: I am still here, as active as I am capable of being.

The debate needs to be about whether the Labour party will be capable of sustaining stable prices within the United Kingdom economy, which we know to be a fundamental basis for the economic and commercial revival of Britain in the 1990s. We know that it cannot do so. We know that the Labour party's interest rate policy is confined to saying, "One per cent. off."

I hope that I can have the attention of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, at least for the next bit of my speech. If he were ever to achieve office, he

would have to be preoccupied with this, and it might be helpful if he were aware of it now. The Labour party is the party of devaluation. The currency went down by 4 per cent. for every year of the last Labour Government. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has been alert to the need to make it clear that that would not happen under a Labour Government. He says, "We would not devalue." There is also his passionate attachment to the exchange rate mechanism, a policy which some of his hon. Friends find chafes a bit. Immediately, there is the prospect of trouble from Labour Back Benchers. During the debate on the economy last week, there were eight speakers from the Labour Back Benches. Four of them advocated devaluation or are exponents of it.

Unlike some of his hon. Friends, I am prepared to accept that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East would not want to devalue the currency. So what premium would a Labour Government be prepared to pay to prove to the international markets that they would not devalue? *[Interruption.]* Despite all his Winchester erudition, the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) has missed a fundamental point. We have nothing to prove. Every other country in the ERM had to put up its interest rates over Christmas in the wake of an increase in German rates. We were the only country that did not have to do so.

If the hon. Member for Durham, North doubts that I am making a serious point, perhaps he will believe some of his old school chums from some of the firms in the City. Nature abhors a vacuum, so, because the Labour party will not tell us what premium it would be prepared to pay in order to show that it would defend the value of the currency, the City has been doing the work for it. I shall read out the list that we have obtained.

The DKB bank said that interest rates would be 2 per cent. higher, Nomura said that they would be 2 per cent. higher, Credit Lyonnais said that they could be up to 4 per cent. higher, Kleinwort Benson said 2 per cent. to 4 per cent. higher, the London business school said up to 3 per cent. higher, James Capel said 1 per cent. higher, UBS Phillips and Drew and Midland Montagu said that they would go up.

The Leader of the Opposition knows well Mr. Gavyn Davies of Goldman Sachs. I think that his wife is still employed by the Leader of the Opposition, and he was an adviser. Yet Goldman Sachs says that interest rates would go up. The Confederation of British Industry said that interest rates would go up, BZW said that they would be 1 per cent. higher, London Economics says that they would be 2·5 per cent. higher and the Halifax says that they would go up. That is the reality facing the British people, but the Labour party will not admit it. The price of a Labour Government would be an immediate hike in interest rates, with all the damage that that would cause. That is what the Labour party will have to answer.

The Labour party does not see the ERM as a serious policy commitment: it sees it as a further way of evading the responsibilities of government. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East fails to understand that ERM membership is a commitment to pursue responsible fiscal and monetary policies, not a substitute for them.

There is no better example of sustained irresponsibility than the refusal of the right hon. and learned Gentleman and the Leader of the Opposition to appreciate the impact on foreign exchange markets and international confidence of calls for reduced interest rates. Labour has had it too easy. It certainly would not have it easy if it were in office, but nor would the rest of us.

The other point that the Labour party must come to terms with is the damage to its reputation done by its failure to control inflation. UBS Phillips and Drew said:

"Labour's image is still tarnished by the rampant inflation of the late 70s. Though memories fade, Labour must impress an electorate sceptical about its ability to manage the economy."

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Will the Chief Secretary give way?

Mr. Mellor: No, I am pushing on now. I have given way a lot.

City analysts have been asking what would be the impact of a Labour Government on inflation. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East is now engaged in conversation with the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett). This is worth listening to, because it is not Tory propaganda but what the financial community, who would judge a Labour Government, think Labour is likely to do.

Nine forecasts were made recently. Economists normally do not agree on anything, but this is so clear-cut that they all said that inflation would be higher under a Labour Government. The average is 2·3 per cent. higher in year two, 3·4 per cent. higher in year three and 3·8 per cent. higher in year four. No wonder the *Financial Times* reports that 87 per cent. of fund managers thought that Labour would not be able to control inflation and only 3 per cent. thought that it would.

The Labour party seems to want to be wilfully blind to this. Returning to things in Putney, we received "Labour News"—"News from Labour in Putney"—I presume that it is pushed through many other doors—which quotes City analysts and says:

"Experts believe that Labour's policies for investment in research and training will make Britain stronger and more prosperous. Labour will build a world class economy."

It does not say which part of the world it has in mind, of course

I should be interested to know what City analysts Labour relies on. It seems to recall that happy old American jibe that the only support that the Labour party is getting for its policies from City analysts is the support that the rope gives the hanged man.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath) *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: Here is an expert on Putney—he lost two elections there.

Mr. Hain: Indeed, but the Chief Secretary will lose to the author of that pamphlet at the next general election.

We have heard a typically juvenile speech from the right hon. and learned Gentleman. We have record mortgage repossessions, businesses and investment and output collapsing, and the economy going down the drain, but all that the right hon. and learned Gentleman can treat us to is a series of comic turns and cheap jibes. When will he give his policies for getting us out of the economic mess that he and his colleagues have created?

Mr. Mellor: It is a bit rich to be accused of juvenilia by the Peter Pan of student activists.

What has been revealed this afternoon is a formidable case for the Labour party to answer—a formidable case that says that Labour has no policies to control inflation,

[Mr. Mellor]

that it would be unable to control inflation, that inflation would increase to double its present level and that interest rates would have to rise as a consequence of a Labour Government.

People thought that Labour's tax plans were bad enough. When we learned about its tax plans, they thought that the cat had got out of the bag. This afternoon, we have provided the reason why the cat got out of Labour's bag—it did not like what was left in it, still waiting to come out. We are now beginning to know.

As such an array of talent is assembled on the Labour Front Bench, may I pose another question about some of the matters with which we have been dealing this year? We have shone a spotlight on Labour's tax and spending plans, and such is the chaos that the Labour party has had to burn the midnight oil to produce a document trying to reconcile them—the self-inflicted wound of proclaiming its new-found ability to manage the economy competently by having limited spending plans properly costed and carried into effect on the back of tax increases which are themselves properly thought through. We saw how long that lasted—about three minutes—but we now hear about the so-called recovery package whose authors are all in front of me.

The hon. Member for Derby, South says that the package will cost £1 billion, that it is part of Beckett's law and will be introduced straight away, as did the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East. However, they neglected to tell the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). In one of his more memorable recent interviews—one does not necessarily expect the right hon. Gentleman to be well briefed, but I do not think that one required a lot of briefing to see what nonsense this is—he said that the recovery package would be paid for out of the recovery that it was supposed to bring about. I assume that that is not Labour party policy, and we shall assume that it is to be introduced straight away.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Mellor: No, I shall carry on, if I may.

We now find that the plot has thickened. We have had a thickened plot in two material respects, on which I shall conclude my remarks. First, the Leader of the Opposition said in an interview in the *Financial Times*—and it might nevertheless be so—that £800 million of the £1 billion package is to be spent on training. It has been put repeatedly to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East that training is not a short-term measure and can certainly not be dignified with the title of a recovery package which will quickly turn the economy around. The right hon. and learned Gentleman can spare me rejecting that, because I had the privilege of turning on my television set at lunchtime to find him engaged in a sort of post-war altercation after last week's debate with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment who made this allegation. My right hon. Friend speaks very effectively, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman found to his cost last week.

Mr. John Smith: The Secretary of State's name is on the motion on the Order Paper, but the right hon. and learned Gentleman's is not.

Mr. Mellor: Now that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has got that off his chest, let him listen for a moment. I promise not to detain him for very long.

My right hon. Friend said that training was not a short-term measure, and the right hon. and learned Gentleman hopped up and down on television saying that indeed it was not.

I had great pleasure—and told the House about a great competition about Labour's priorities—in reading the document "Women Today", which turns out to be a Labour party brief. I hope that the hon. Member for Derby, South is concentrating, because I am about to quote her, or what somebody has ill advisedly put into her mouth. The hon. Lady features in the document under the bold headline "We'll put an end to the waste of money". She said:

> "We have a very tight series of priorities . . . we need early investment in education, in training, in industry—the things that will take a long time to show results."

What price the recovery package, the £1 billion bingo which will turn the British economy on straight away? It is inherently risible that a £1 billion package will turn on an economy of £600 billion. It is even more risible when four fifths of it is to be spent on training.

There is a second point on which I would welcome assistance from the Opposition. We want to know how the £800 million might be spent on training. I am aware of the fact that the Labour party has made a commitment which means—as usual, the Labour party has far more interest in trade unions than in some of those who might benefit from public expenditure—that every trainee must have a minimum wage. The cost——

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Mellor: I am glad that the hon. Lady is going to correct that, because if Labour's pledge to give a minimum wage to the unemployed persons who go into training or the pledge involving young people who do youth training is honoured, £630 million of the £800 million would go on paying extra money to existing trainees in order to top them up.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): Pathetic!

Mr. Mellor: I did not invent this recovery package, and I would rather have spent my time dealing with more intelligent matters. It is the Opposition who are parading the recovery package. I ask: when is a recovery package not a recovery package? Answer: when it is a piece of nonsense like this one.

I hope that today we will discover something more concrete and more persuasive about the Labour party's policy on inflation. At the moment, Labour's economic policy is a bit like a haggis—for most people it is okay only as long as they do not think too much about what has gone into it. [HON. MEMBERS: "Disgraceful."] As usual, Scottish tails are wagging Labour's English dog. They may not be alert to matters of economic policy, but they are alert to my last point. I would be interested to know not only about the contents of a haggis but about the persuasive contents of Labour's anti-inflation policy. I think that we should be told: I hope that we will be told.

4.40 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'believes that inflation, though reduced from levels to which Government policy raised it, has not been conquered, but merely suppressed by high interest rates and the recession they have created, at a cost of rising business failures, mortgage repossessions, and soaring unemployment; and recognising that low inflation is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for recovery, calls upon the Government to introduce measures which include support for investment in manufacturing industry and in training, since without such measures inflationary pressures will simply re-emerge.'.

There are two reasons why we are having today's debate in which the Government boast of today's inflation and interest rates, which are both certainly lower than they were a year ago. The first reason is clear: of what else could they boast—of soaring unemployment, soaring house repossessions, soaring bankruptcies, plummeting investment and negative growth? The Government would have some difficulty talking about any of those, so they do not.

The second reason for this debate is that the Government hope that if they talk enough about their concern for inflation the wish will be taken for the deed. They hope that we will all remember what they said about inflation—the history books are littered with stern words about it—and not what they actually did about it. The Government motion seeks to compare their record not only with that of the previous Labour Government but with that of the European Community, particularly Germany, claiming that inflation is now below the EC average and close to the rate in Germany.

For most of the Government's period in office the yearly average retail prices index has been above the EC average; the last time it fell below it, by a remarkable coincidence, was during and in the aftermath of the Government's first recession in the early 1980s. Only their second recession has again suppressed inflation to below the EC average, and only the strains of German reunification have brought German inflation to the level to which ours has been reduced by recession.

In any case it is only a few months since the Government were telling us that it was wrong to compare the retail prices index with EC inflation figures. We should, they said, use the underlying rate excluding mortgage costs. Of course, that rate does not show the same flattering picture.

The Government's main text, however, is undoubtedly the domestic record and circumstances of the last Labour Government and the record and circumstances of this Government. The Labour Government were elected in February 1974. They inherited the aftermath of the Barber boom—inflation at 13·1 per cent., a public sector borrowing requirement at 6 per cent. of GDP, and a quadrupling of oil prices, as well as rising world commodity prices and disadvantageous terms of trade.

The Labour Government tried to absorb the effects of the oil price rise without a major change of course. In consequence, as the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) said in his speech, peak inflation rates of 26 per cent. were reached by 1975, together with an increase in the public sector borrowing requirement to a maximum of over 9 per cent. of GDP—but that, I repeat, was the maximum.

The major contributory factors to the peak inflation rate and the peak PSBR level were the levels of inherited inflation and inherited PSBR coupled with the oil price shock——

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No. This was at a time when Britain was a heavy net importer of oil.

By 1979 when Labour left office—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members want to know about the record: let them listen to it then.

By 1979, when Labour left office, inflation was at 10·3 per cent.——

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North) *rose*——

Mrs. Beckett: In a moment. That was lower than the level that we had inherited. Unemployment, at more than one million, was falling. Interest rates were at 12 per cent. having averaged 10·7 per cent. It is not only our view that the peak levels of inflation to which I have referred were something to do with what we inherited from the Conservative party——

Mr. Burt *rose*——

Mrs. Beckett: In a moment. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is anxious to hear the following quotation from the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), who said on 12 May 1981:

"Monetary growth was allowed to accelerate rapidly in 1972 and 1973 under the impression that, now the fixed exchange rate discipline was gone, this was the way to increase output. By 1975, inflation, helped by the rise in the price of oil, had risen to 25 per cent."

The right hon. and learned Gentleman fairly made the point that the Labour Government's inheritance contributed to that level of inflation——

Mr. Burt *rose*——

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley) *rose*——

Mrs. Beckett: Not for a few more moments. Between 1974 and 1979 the PSBR fell again to 5 per cent. of GDP, lower not only than the peak but than the inherited figure.

Tory Members always talk about the record of the last Labour Government, so I repeat that, when we left office, inflation was lower than the figure that we inherited from the Conservatives, as was the PSBR. That Labour Government not only lowered inflation and the PSBR but achieved average growth of 2·2 per cent., more than the average in these recent years, and laid the foundations for the flow of revenues from the North sea which would amount to more than £100 billion in today's prices—a sum that shielded this Government for so long from the disastrous effects of their incompetence. These were the circumstances and the record of the last Labour Government, and now I shall give way.

Mr. Burt: The hon. Lady skipped conveniently from 1975 to 1979. What do the letters IMF mean to her?

Mrs. Beckett: They mean the International Monetary Fund to me; I am not sure what they mean to the hon. Gentleman, or what they have to do with the fact that inflation was lowered by the Labour Government, as was the PSBR.

Mr. Burt *rose*——

Hon. Members: Give way!

Mrs. Beckett: No, once is enough.

I come now to what the Conservative party really wants to hear about—the record of the Conservative Government. Conservative Members are delighted with that record so they must be anxious to hear what it is——

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mrs. Beckett: No, I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman seemed incapable a few moments ago of distinguishing my sex, so I feel disinclined to give way to him. Perhaps he needs glasses.

In May 1979, this Goverament came to power. In their June 1979 Budget the Government raised VA from 8 to 15 per cent. That alone added four percentage points to the retail prices index. In their Budget of June 1979 they reduced subsidies for prices such as those for gas and electricity, which added another 2·5 per cent. to the retail prices index. Interest rates in that same Budget were raised by 2 per cent. and peaked at 17 per cent. in November 1979. There were other factors which affected the rate of inflation, but these were within the Government's discretion. Earlier, the Chief Secretary quoted Sir Brian Corby on the rooting out of inflationary psychology applying to all levels of society, including the Government.

The VAT rise especially was made to pay for the pre-election promise to cut taxes on incomes, and it was made in the belief—*[Interruption.]* I will explain in the fullness of time, if hon. Members will be patient—and listen, of course. It was made with a belief in the magical properties of controlling the money supply—a process that seemed to be believed, at least by some, to ensure no increase in inflation, no matter what other policy changes were made.

It was small wonder that by May 1980 inflation had reached 21·9 per cent.—more than double the rate that the Conservative Government inherited—with at least 6 per cent. to 7 per cent. of that increase being inflationary own goals inflicted by the Government to allow them to cut taxes.

Mr. Marlow: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No.

The economy was forced into recession, unemployment soared to 3 million—a rate of 13·3 per cent., which was 7 per cent. higher than in 1979. We lost 20 per cent. of our manufacturing capacity. However, by 1983 and with the approach of a general election, those policies, a fall in the price of oil and other commodities, and the emergence of more favourable terms of trade all contributed to bringing inflation and interest rates down, although gross domestic product and manufacturing investment had been savaged and were both below the level inherited by this Government in 1979.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): How is increasing the tax burden on savings income supposed to increase investment?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that our proposal for a charge on investment income above—[HON. MEMBERS: "A tax."] A charge. When the Conservatives put up national insurance contributions from 6·5 per cent. to 9 per cent., was that a tax? Conservatives did not say that it was a tax. If a charge is a tax, so is that on national insurance contributions, which the Conservatives increased from 6·5 per cent. to 9 per cent. That was a tax increase.

I return to the question put by the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies), as hon. Members clearly prefer me to deal with that point. We have made the point on many occasions in the House that the proposed charge will simply put people with investment incomes on individual investment holdings of probably well over £30,000 on the same basis as those who have similar sums of earned income. That seems to us to be fair and that is why we propose it.

Mr. Mellor *rose*——

Mrs. Beckett: No, I shall not give way because I am in the middle of a point about inflation. I will come back to the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

In June 1983, the date of the general election, inflation was brought down by those methods to 3·7 per cent. and interest rates were 9·5 per cent. Within two years of the 1983 election, in June 1985——

Mr. Oppenheim: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No.

Mr. Oppenheim: Why not?

Mrs. Beckett: Because every time I give way to the hon. Gentleman he asks the same silly question. I am bored with it.

Mr. Oppenheim: I have a new question.

Mrs. Beckett: I do not believe it.

Within two years of the election, in June 1985, interest rates were back at 12 per cent. and inflation had doubled to 7 per cent. Once again, the pattern was emerging of increases in rates and water charges—within the Government's purview—and those increases were well above the rate of inflation. Again, by the time of the election in 1987, interest rates were down again to 9 per cent. and inflation was at 4·2 per cent. The Government were making claims. The Prime Minister himself wrote in the election campaign that year in the *Huntingdon Post*:

"Inflation has gone. The economy is sound. Unemployment is falling."

People voted on that basis.

In October 1987, after the stock market crash, the Government took the step of cutting interest rates, which they now claim is almost their sole mistake in all these years. In the 1988 Budget, they claimed an economic miracle and cut taxes afresh to their present level. Flushed with money and rhetoric, companies and individuals went on a credit spree and the Government went on feeding inflation.

The Government went on cutting money for public sector housing and forcing councils to increase rents. They went on cutting transport subsidies and forcing up fares. They insisted on price increases for gas, which were followed by increases for water and electricity to fatten those industries for privatisation. They also made hikes in prescription and other charges, and they pushed up interest rates to 15 per cent. and kept them there for a year. With that, they pushed up mortgages, mortgage debt and

repossessions. They pushed up unemployment and business failures, yet still they went on with inflationary own goals.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I cannot resist finding out whether the hon. Gentleman really has thought of a new point. I give way.

Mr. Oppenheim: I thank the hon. Lady for her graciousness in giving way. As the hon. Lady is clearly wedded to the exchange rate mechanism, will she confirm that a future Labour Government, if such a Government should come to power, would raise interest rates to defend sterling within the ERM if necessary? Yes or no?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that we have long expressed the view that, if the exchange rate is properly managed, there is no need to take that step—*[Interruption.]* Let the hon. Gentleman put that question to his right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary if he chooses.

Mr. Mellor: Is the hon. Lady aware that her answer is one of the most extraordinary cop-outs? She would not be able to hold office in the Treasury for 10 seconds unless she was prepared to improve on that.

Mrs. Beckett: The right hon. and learned Gentleman seems to have managed it.

The Government went on inflicting inflationary own goals.

Mr. Mellor: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No. Once is enough on that subject.

I have a cutting from the *Financial Times* of 12 May 1990 which makes the point admirably. The article says:

"Hardly ever, outside wartime, can a government have done so much to push up the inflation rate in a single month as this administration has achieved in the April calculation of the General Index of Retail Prices."

The Government went on inflicting inflationary own goals and within two years of the 1987 general election interest rates were back at 15 per cent., inflation had doubled again to 8·3 per cent. on its way to its 10·9 per cent. peak and, once again, we were heading for recession with the then Chancellor, now the Prime Minister, saying only that if it was not hurting, it was not working.

In the *Financial Times* article an additional comment was made. Drawing on the inflationary own goals that the Government had inflicted in a short time, the writer points out that that contrasts oddly with the Budget speech by the then Chancellor, now the Prime Minister, in March when he set out the Government's economic policy objectives. The article says that the first objective

"is to bring inflation down again."

The commentator then writes:

"But perhaps that aim should have been more explicitly stated: to reduce inflation *just before the next General Election.*"

This is a Jekyll and Hyde approach to inflation control. With the advent of an election and in the pre-election period, Dr. Jekyll takes over and everyone is very good about inflation. Once an election is safely over, within two years, Mr. Hyde is letting rip and we see the effects on inflation and on interest rates.

Conservative Members dislike that comparison so much because, sure enough, as today we approach yet another general election, interest rates are at 10·5 per cent. and we are waiting, yet again, for the Chancellor to decide when it will be politically beneficial to the Conservative party, rather than when it will be most advantageous to the economy, to cut them—and inflation is around 4 per cent. again. On 16 February, *The Sunday Times* said:

"Any fool can reduce inflation if he is prepared to lay the economy flat on its back."

Of course, we know the fools who have.

Growth was down in 1991 by 2·5 per cent., the worst fall in a calendar year since the great depression of the 1930s. Unemployment is at 2·6 million and on its way, most people forecast, to 3 million.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No. I know that hon. Members do not want this on the record, but I am determined to put it there.

Three thousand jobs have been lost every day since the Prime Minister got his new job; 75,500 homes were repossessed last year, 72 per cent. up on the year before; perhaps a million people are said by the building societies to be in serious mortgage debt, that is, up to two months in arrears; and 47,800 businesses went bankrupt in 1990, the highest on record and a 65 per cent. increase on the year before. Manufacturing investment has fallen by 14 per cent. and is predicted by the CBI to fall again this year by perhaps 6 per cent. in this quarter. Today's Chancellor calls all that a price well worth paying to suppress inflation, without even a syllable of apology for the incompetence and mismanagement that pushed it up.

We believe that it is vital to keep inflation low. That is one of the reasons why we urged the Government to join the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system. But while low inflation may be a necessary condition for economic success, it is by no means sufficient. Too much money chasing too few goods is the classic definition of inflation. The Government have relied solely on one side of that equation—the supply of money. They have ignored the supply of goods and services, leaving it all to the market. If we allow our productive capacity to be further reduced—and as people begin again to want to purchase goods and services—inflation is bound to rise again. Even in recession we have inflationary bottlenecks and skill shortages. What is the Government's response? It is to go on cutting Government support for training, for industry and for the regions and to ignore falling levels of investment.

Professor Brian Reading pointed out some time ago in his evidence to the Treasury Select Committee that

"reducing demand through lower investment cuts inflation in the short run but increases inflation in the long run."

Mr. Beith: The hon. Lady has not yet made clear what a Labour Government's response would be if the circumstances that she has described were to take place. She has cast doubt on whether such a Government would even be prepared to take the steps necessary to defend Britain's position in the exchange rate mechanism. What would a Labour Government do if they were confronted with inflation rising at a time of recovery?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman is being ridiculous. He knows perfectly well that we have made it clear on the record and consistently that we would maintain the exchange rate. He aspires to be considered a senior

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commentator on Treasury matters. He should know better than to cast doubt on the wish of any prospective Government to maintain the exchange rate.

Mr. Mellor: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: Again?

Mr. Mellor: I shall make the same point that I made earlier to the hon. Lady. The way in which currency levels are managed is by interest rates. That is the way it is done throughout the ERM. I am astonished that the hon. Lady is not prepared to give the commitment that the Chancellor has always given—one cannot have a commitment to the ERM unless one does.

Mrs. Beckett: We have given a commitment that we will maintain the exchange rate. We have given it consistently and the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows that perfectly well.

We must maintain low inflation and stable conditions so that business can plan ahead, address the supply side failures and, above all, avoid inflationary own goals. What about the Government's own policy? What are they going to do? What can we learn from the motion? Not very much, actually. In the motion is the claim that Labour will inevitably increase inflation. The Government have doubled it three times in 13 years. In the motion is the claim that Labour will push up interest rates. Interest rates and mortgage rates have been pushed up between elections in each of the Government's terms of office. Interest rates under them have averaged 12·4 per cent. as opposed to 10·7 per cent. under the previous Labour Government, and mortgage rates have reached the highest levels on record.

In the motion the Government claim that Labour will increase unemployment. Unemployment is double the rate that we left—and climbing—even though the Government have changed the way it is counted 30 times. They claim that our policies to promote investment, research and development, and on inflation and education and to improve the transport infrastructure, to create the wealth to enable us better to fund our public services will not work here when they are working in every successful economy in the world. They claim that we alone cannot make what is best practice in Europe common practice here.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I shall not give way. I am almost at the end of my speech.

What is the vision that the Conservative party offers to the people of Britain in the 1990s? "Look at our record over 13 years," they say. "Re-elect us," they say, "and we will do it all again." They say, "We will shove up interest rates again and double inflation again." To show that they really mean it, we have that felicitous statement from the Chancellor, "If we'd known how it would turn out, we wouldn't have done anything different." There could not be a better statement of their arrogance. Let it be their epitaph.

5.6 pm

Sir Ian Stewart (Hertfordshire, North): The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) will live to regret the extraordinary performance that she has delivered to the House this afternoon. Instead of the clear commitment which she should give to the methods necessary to maintain sterling in the exchange rate mechanism, if there were a Labour Government, we have been answered by evasion and prevarication. When she was asked, by not only my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury but my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) and the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), whether a Labour Government would defend sterling within the mechanism by the use of interest rates, she found every possible means of avoiding an answer. Unfortunately, that is not a casual lapse.

The Labour party's approach to inflation has been careful to avoid making any of the commitments necessary to justify its claim that it would maintain sterling within the permitted bands. That is one of the main reasons why all commentators and serious analysts who looked at the figures, policies, proposals and statements of the Labour party have concluded that inflation would be higher under a Labour Government. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary quoted many commentators this afternoon. They may differ in the amount by which they think that inflation would increase or the amount by which they think interest rates would have to rise in order to gain control of inflation, but none of them disagrees with the basic proposition that inflation would be higher under a Labour Government. It is not difficult to see the reasons why.

It is the stated policy of the Labour party to increase public expenditure by an enormous amount, not just by £5 billion, £10 billion or £20 billion but by between £30 billion and £40 billion. I lose count because Labour Members frequently change their commitment and priorities, but the latest estimates are approaching £40 billion in annual terms. Of course, it is not possible for a party which is committed to those spending priorities to convince the markets or independent commentators and analysts that its approach to economic management and monetary policy is sound unless it is prepared to explain how it would finance it. On top of making public expenditure commitments, Labour Members have encouraged almost every inflationary wage claim that has been made by public sector employees; yet they expect to be able to hold down wage claims in the public sector—with all the consequences that such claims have on public expenditure—as soon as they come into office. It simply is not a credible approach.

Above all, the Labour party has not understood the practical implications of its extraordinary policy for a minimum wage. It does not seem to understand that a minimum wage would not only squeeze out jobs at the lower end of the scale and impose extra costs on employers who retain labour at higher wages but have a knock-on effect on differentials all the way up the scale.

If a person who earns 10 per cent. less than someone else receives a 10 per cent. wage increase under the minimum wage provisions, does the Labour party believe that other workers who previously had a 10 per cent. differential would calmly accept that without putting in a claim to maintain their differential? All economic analysis

of the minimum wage proposal has concluded that a minimum wage would achieve an astounding double: it would put up inflation and unemployment simultaneously.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Will the right hon. Gentleman explain why a high wage economy such as that of West Germany, as it was then, was so successful, had such low inflation and had proper manufacturing jobs instead of some of the cheap-jack jobs that we have here at present?

Sir Ian Stewart: I can give two answers to the hon. Gentleman. The first is that in Germany a responsible financial and monetary policy has been pursued for many years. That is something which the Labour party seems unable to recognise as necessary for sound economic management. Secondly, we are not talking about the continuation of a wage system, with or without minimum wages; we are talking about the effects of introducing a minimum wage system. The effect would be not only to put up the cost to employers in respect of existing employees and deny the labour market to some of those who in current circumstances are able to enter it but to create an upward pressure on the wages of many people who earn wages slightly above those affected by the minimum wage proposals. That is difficult to quantify exactly, but it is unavoidable that the consequence of a minimum wage would be an increase in wage costs which would work a long way up the scale.

The Labour party has not begun to understand the implications of its proposal. It is not surprising, therefore, that it does not realise why its policies are so incompatible with the commitment to which it says that it adheres—keeping sterling within the exchange rate mechanism. If ever there were any credibility in the Labour party's protestations on that subject, it was blown apart this afternoon by the extraordinarily evasive answers given by the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury. I am sorry that she felt it beyond her to respond to a Conservative Member, but she might at least have responded to the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed when he asked, perfectly reasonably, how she could justify her party's commitment to the ERM if she was not prepared to will the means as well as the ends.

Mr. Marlow: My right hon. Friend is setting out some of the grave disadvantages of a Labour Government, if elected. But is not the immediate price that we would have to pay the fact that, fairly or unfairly, reasonably or unreasonably, the financial markets would not trust a Labour Government, as they do not now? In any circumstances, there would have to be a higher rate of interest under a Labour Government than under a Conservative Government. What effect would that have on the recovery? What effect would it have on those people who are already having difficulty paying their mortgage? Would not it have a devastating effect within two weeks, six weeks or two months of the election of a Labour Government?

Sir Ian Stewart: The impact would be both early and severe, as my hon. Friend rightly points out. That is another reason why I suspect that the Labour party's commitment to maintaining membership of the ERM, with sterling at the present level, is not sincere.

I suggest that if the Labour party wants to be taken seriously, it must look again at its contradictory policies. It says that it has massive public expenditure priorities. It intends to introduce a minimum wage and take steps which would undoubtedly put upward pressure on inflation. At the same time it constantly avoids admitting that it would take any other steps necessary to deal with inflation or, indeed, to protect the exchange rate of sterling.

I suggest that the Labour party does one of two things: either it should scale down its public spending commitments to a credible level and drop its proposal for a minimum wage or it should admit that it is not committed to the ERM. So long as it continues to try to have it both ways, it will not be believed on either of those commitments. The reason why the Labour party is not believed on its commitment to the ERM is simply that the rest of its economic policies are clearly incompatible with that commitment. So it should clear up the mess.

I do not know whether the hon. Member for Derby, South let out of the bag a kitten or a cat this afternoon, but I am afraid that in her carefully evasive replies she showed that the Labour party has no underlying commitment to maintain the ERM parities for sterling.

I came here this afternoon hoping that the hon. Member for Derby, South would give us a more coherent exposition of the Labour party's economic policies. As inflation was the subject of the debate, I hoped that she would speak about the Labour party's approach to inflation and how it would control it and continue to bear down on it. I suppose that I was over-optimistic. Of course, we have been disappointed again. But one or two chinks of light have been seen on the Labour party's real approach to economic policy. Many people have pointed out that there is a yawning gap at the centre of the Labour party's economic policies because it has not reconciled its expenditure commitments with either its plans for taxation or its approach to borrowing and interest rates.

I suspect that at the heart of the Labour party's policy is the policy that dare not speak its name—printing money. That is the only way out that the Labour party has left.

Mr. Radice: I am interested to hear what the right hon. Gentleman has to say, but will he comment on the fact that the public sector borrowing requirement is likely to be well over £20 billion under a Government who are apparently committed to balancing the budget?

Sir Ian Stewart: I will do so but only briefly because it is not the subject of my speech. I did not hear the hon. Gentleman complain when the public sector debt repayment figure was large. That is something which his party never achieved. Of course, at certain points in the economic cycle there will be a surplus and at others a deficit. I believe that an acceptable deficit at this point in the economic cycle is the correct policy. I hope that my right hon. Friends will follow that. We have never raised the public sector borrowing requirement to anything like the percentage of gross domestic product to which the Labour party raised it when it was in office.

The Labour party says that it will not increase taxes other than those to which it has already committed itself. It says that it will make public expenditure increases within the amount that it can afford. The figures do not add up. The Labour party must accept that, unless it is prepared to explain how its policies will be implemented, its commitments and expressions of adherence to the

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exchange rate discipline of the ERM will not be believed. Unless it is prepared to sort that out before or during the election, it will not be able to argue that it has a coherent or responsible policy for economic management and, therefore, that it is credible and could be trusted with the government of Britain.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Ian Stewart: Yes, but I am under pressure of time.

Mr. Randall: I have listened carefully to the right hon. Gentleman. His speech so far has been based on the completely false assumption that the Labour party will go ahead with a spending programme based on a Tory propaganda figure—£35 billion, £50 billion or whatever. That is an utterly false assumption, so the validity of everything that he is saying is out of court. I wish that the Conservative party would stop peddling its propaganda in that way because it results in worthless debating time.

Sir Ian Stewart: The hon. Gentleman is a decent chap, and I do not want to pin the blame on him, but if he wants his party to be taken seriously he has to persuade the leadership of the Labour party to stop its spokesmen saying in every debate and at meetings throughout the country on health, education, transport and everything else that they have massive spending priorities for an incoming Labour Government. If the Labour party is prepared to scrap all that, to rip it out of its policy documents, and not to mention it in manifestos, Labour would attract greater credibility. Until it does so, one can only take the Labour party at face value.

If Labour Members spell things out in such detail and if their spokesmen go to such great lengths to explain what they want to do, it is not surprising that people will believe them. Labour has undermined its credibility by having internally inconsistent policy objectives, and I am trying to point that out. I am trying to be helpful to Labour because its policies would be more credible if the party faced up to that central problem.

I have been too generous in giving way to comply with the request of the Chair that we should not speak at great length. As we approach the Budget, the question is: would it be inflationary to have some reduction in taxation? My view is that it would not. At this stage of the economic cycle it is clear that the savings ratio is high. Consumers, for many reasons—not excluding the fact that they live in fear of the Labour party's tax policies—are reluctant to commit themselves to expenditure of the kind that would assist in bringing about further economic recovery.

If my right hon. Friend the Chancellor concludes that it would be possible to reduce personal taxation in this Budget, he would be right to do so on economic grounds. That is the right economic response to the present position.

Mr. Radice: It is deathbed Keynesianism.

Sir Ian Stewart: One problem with the policies advocated by Lord Keynes was that they were always applied in one part of a cycle but not in the other part. Lord Keynes never said that one had to stimulate the economy with extra borrowing and public expenditure not only when it needed to be given a stimulus but also once it was growing at a satisfactory rate. That is why the so-called Keynesian approach to economics fell down.

The correct time for adjustments in personal taxation is not only when they can be afforded because of the fiscal position but when it is the right moment in the economic cycle. I can only recommend reductions in personal taxation if they are accompanied by a commitment to keep firm control on public expenditure as the economy recovers, so that the public sector borrowing requirement reduces as the recovery takes place. Without such a commitment I would not make that recommendation, but with it I have no doubt that it would assist in the approach to consumer confidence which is a necessary part of the platform for economic recovery that the Government are putting in place.

In those circumstances, I regret that, in an economic debate, the Labour party has once again failed to tackle any of the central issues in a way that would inspire confidence in its proposals and lead to economic recovery. Labour has dodged the issue of how it would tackle inflation and has added to the confusion about its monetary and exchange rate policy. This afternoon the Labour party has demonstrated that it is even more unfit to come into government than I thought before the debate and the debate will certainly have helped to ensure that it does not.

5.24 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): I hope that the first speaker from the Government Front Bench will be kind enough to return to the House. In years gone by, we had an old custom that the main speakers in a debate used to stay to listen to replies to their questions, but perhaps that has changed. Possibly the Chief Secretary will return.

I shall try to discover why this debate has taken place. It is certainly something of a mystery. However, it would be rude of me if I did not also comment on the speech of the right hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Sir. I. Stewart). I understand that he has been a great defender of the Government's monetarist policies in the past decade. Five or 10 years ago, during debates on this subject, Government spokesmen made great speeches—I dare say that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, or whatever he calls himself, who has just left us, made many speeches on the same topic—but how different was their allegiance and the economic policies which they followed.

We are witnessing the biggest somersault of the monetarists in history. The next Budget will be produced on full-blooded Keynesian lines, although it is rough on Keynes that his name should be used in such disreputable circumstances. Even so, they are using good Keynesian arguments now. Those of us who were brought up on Keynes think that the application of his doctrines should be more carefully considered, and I hope that the Government will do that before they proceed along those lines.

I heard every word in the speech of the right hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North. He said that he was convinced by the Government's case, but that he was not at all convinced by the case which my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) put so well. Well, he must be a hopeless case. He is beyond all recovery.

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mr. Foot: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment if he is so anxious to interrupt.

I should have thought that any normal person listening to the two speeches by the Chief Secretary and the right hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North would have been insulted. I thought that the House was insulted by the speech from the Treasury Bench but, as is the custom, the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South was different. Never in the history of Oppositions has there been such a settled, deliberate and determined case—she presented the figures to the nation so that people could balance the different sides of the equation. This Opposition and my hon. Friend have done that more skilfully than any other Opposition. She has put the case on behalf of the entire official Opposition. That is one of the reasons why the Labour party will win the next election.

Mr. Marlow: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's courtesy. He says that he is impressed by the case put forward by his hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett). Could he tell what that case was, because I do not think that any of us heard her put a case? Could he tell us how she would maintain the parity of sterling within the ERM? What would she do with interest rates in those circumstances—would she use them?

Mr. Foot: I recommend that the hon. Gentleman reads the case put by my hon. Friend—[HON. MEMBERS: "He cannot."] If he could not hear her, I hope that his eyes will be able to rectify the position and that he will study exactly what she said. Anyone comparing the two cases put by the Front Benches could see the difference, and could see that my hon. Friend's was a first-class case.

I have discovered the reason for the Chief Secretary's difficulties. I may be the only Member of Parliament who has discovered the origin of this debate. The secret was out in a newspaper report which I read the other day. It said that the Prime Minister had set up a special committee to advise him on election tactics. The names in the report made an interesting list. Such an auspicious committee should have a fitting name; perhaps it could be called the "flagship committee", because that has a good auld lang syne ring about it. All its members are strong supporters of the poll tax, and no doubt that is one of the qualifications for membership.

The flagship committee has serious problems to solve. For example, what will be done with the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) during the election? Is there still a helicopter to take her to Southend without running the risk of a forced landing in Old Bexley and Sidcup on the way back? For such an old-fashioned debate the chief cook and bottle washer of the Conservative party, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), should be here. We all remember his wonderful speech in defence of the poll tax when the right hon. Member for Finchley sat beside him. He spoke for one and a quarter hours without a single note, without hesitation and without a single principle. No doubt he is fully qualified to sit on the flagship committee.

Some people used to think that the Secretary of State for Education and Science, who represents a Nottinghamshire constituency, was not sufficiently ardent in his Thatcherism. He goes to committee meetings waving his emblem. No doubt he waves his wallet and they know that he is a proper Thatcherite at heart.

It is customary for Chancellors of the Exchequer to sit on such committees, and apparently the present Chancellor has been invited. However, the Prime Minister could have been forgiven for thinking that there was a case for saying that it would not be too heavy a cost to bear if the Chancellor were not on the committee. It would be a price worth paying, shall we say? Perhaps the Prime Minister considered it on those counts. The people of the committee are a remarkable lot.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury was not even invited. He was sent along here but, having listened to his speech, I wish that the exchange had been the other way round. The Secretary of State for the Environment spoke a few days ago, and I thought that we would get him again today. He was in tremendous form; I thought that at any moment he would make off again with the Mace. Oliver Cromwell did that only once but I thought that the right hon. Gentleman was about to do it for the second time.

I do not hold the Mace episode against the right hon. Gentleman, and I have often thought that it was the best thing he ever did. It was certainly the most dangerous military action in which he was engaged after he was in the Ministry of Defence. Some of us recall the right hon. Gentleman coming to the House with the mud and blood of battle on his tunic from Greenham Common. He thought that he had managed a wonderful victory and that that should have made him Prime Minister. It is certainly a better reason than the others that he seems to be advancing.

If the flagship committee is not as successful as it should be, I hope that some others will be invited to help. We do not see him often in his place, but what about the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen)? He seems to be at a loose end at the moment. He could be invited to come along, and I am sure that he would not charge anything, although he might insist on one of Lord Young's sweeteners being arranged after the election. Perhaps that bargain has already been sealed. If the right hon. Member for Devonport appears on a Conservative platform, or even the Prime Minister's platform, during the election campaign, we can conclude that such a bargain has been made, and we shall all watch to see whether it will be kept.

The Prime Minister himself is on the flagship committee. At the weekend, he spoke feelingly about his passion for maintaining the unity of the United Kingdom. Not all of us have been able to see whether he has a heart, but when he went to Scotland he expressed his passionate support for maintaining the unity of the United Kingdom. Was his passion still burning, or had it burnt out after discussions in previous flagship committees about whether the poll tax should be applied to Scotland?

It would have been an apposite moment to bring up the matter if someone had said, "Hold on a moment. Do you think that it is a good thing for the unity of the United Kingdom to go ahead with this horrific tax and impose it on the Scots even before it has been worked out for England?" If the Prime Minister is such an eager supporter of the unity of the United Kingdom, it might have occurred to him three or four years ago when the matter was being discussed by the flagship committee of those times.

Another of the Chief Secretary's qualifications for being on the committee is that he has been a strong supporter of the poll tax and has voted for every poll tax measure that has been guillotined. I do not say that he was

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one of its inventors, although he would have claimed he was if he had thought that it would do him any good at the time. He disowned those matters easily thereafter.

The whole exhibition of the flagship committee is due chiefly to the poll tax, but it is also connected with all the Government's other misdemeanours, disasters and economic catastrophes. It has been one of the most disgraceful episodes of our political history. It is not easy to find words to describe it properly. The best words to describe the conduct of the flagship committees and their past, present and attempted future were written by Alexander Pope:

"As hags hold sabbaths, less from joy than spite,
So these their merry, miserable night . . .
Still round and round the ghosts of beauty glide,
And haunt the places where their honour died."

That is a fitting epitaph for the Government.

We have seen, especially during the past few years but even before that, the prostitution of Parliament to serve the narrow interest of the Conservative party. That has happened before in our history, and when prostitution has taken place on that scale, as it did in the 1930s, the threat to our country has been severe. I do not say that the present Administration have the same evil quality as the Conservative Government of the 1930s, but they are the nearest rival in our history, and we should take account of that.

I say that not only because of the Government's antics and the way that they have pressed through legislation, or because of their performance in this debate, but because of their performance over the whole poll tax Parliament. We are approaching the end of it, and as soon as the flagship committee has the courage to go to the country, the people will pronounce on this perverted, prostituted Parliament the judgment that they pronounced in 1945. The liberation that the British people sought then they will seek again, and nothing will stop them achieving it.

5.40 pm

Sir Gerrard Neale (Cornwall, North): It is always a pleasure to be in the Chamber to listen to the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot). His best speeches have a number of consistent points—they show great parliamentary debating skill and great humour, but his very best ones rarely deal with the point of the debate. It was interesting to note that, even in response to an intervention, he found it impossible to clarify the Opposition's stance on the exchange rate mechanism.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary and the Treasury team have every cause to be congratulated on their achievements on the rate of inflation. It is no surprise to me—although it appears to be one to Labour Members—that we are having a debate on inflation. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister took office, he made it plain that low inflation was a fundamental part of his policy. He was joined in that by our right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who made it similarly plain.

I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) in his place and no doubt hoping to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker. We view the position with a clear perspective—that high inflation is bad news for the economy of the west country in general and of Cornwall in particular. I am surprised that the Opposition do not appear to have grasped the fundamental importance of inflation to our economy. Several industries in Cornwall have been hit by high inflation. Tourism suffers dramatically if prices rise quickly; our farming industry is hit heavily if food prices rise quickly; and our economy depends on competitive pricing and firm monetary policies. Without them, we would have fearfully high levels of unemployment and transport costs, which would make it impossible for us to get our products and services into the economy of the remainder of the United Kingdom.

I want to make a few comments on behalf of small business. Some 85 per cent. of businesses in Britain employ fewer than six people, and 95 per cent. fewer than 20. They are fearful of what would happen if the Labour party took office—although I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Sir I. Stewart) that that is very much less likely after the speeches that we have heard today from Labour Members. Small business men have a fear of high interest rates. Labour Mambers may chuckle, but my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary let them off lightly today. He quoted a number of reports from different economic institutions on the calculations of any increase in interest rates. He referred to the Nomura report, but what he did not say—and what the Opposition should remind themselves of—is that the report envisages that, with the advent of a Labour Government, interest rates could rise not by 2 per cent., but by 21 per cent. If we need proof of where that has happened before, we need look only at what happened when a socialist President was elected in France and short-term rates rose to 31 per cent.

I know that it is unpalatable, but Labour Members must accept that unless they are much clearer about their economic policy, especially in relation to the exchange rate mechanism, on the night of the election the institutions handling funds will be ready to remove money from this country at the very moment that they think there is any threat of a Labour Government. It is not something that any of us can do anything about. Those people handle funds on behalf of investors. If they think that there is a risk of a Labour Government, with the sort of wishy-washy approach that they would take, the institutions will move money out of this country at such a rate that the rate of inflation will have to rocket if the Labour party is to hold firm to the ERM. If any Labour Member disbelieves me, he should look at the Nomura report.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North referred to the minimum wage. I say again to Labour Members that if they came to my constituency, which is heavily dominated by small businesses—as many rural constituencies are—they would appreciate that those employed in such businesses on low wages help to keep the books and to collect the money. There is little money in many of those businesses because they are small. Everybody is a Man Friday of some description or another. They know the facts of life for their businesses.

Of course, everybody would like to have more money per week. The bosses of those small businesses would like to have more money per week. There is hardly anyone in this country who would not like to have more money per week. However, the people in those small businesses know that the money simply is not there. If a minimum wage were imposed, such businesses would disappear. To

survive, many of them need the same number of people that they have helping them; they could not get by with fewer people. If the basic wage is pushed up, those businesses would become unviable.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North pointed out the way in which a minimum wage could affect differentials. In the west country, like any other area, those in small businesses—which are trading in considerable difficulty, not only because of the market place but because of their size—understand that the minimum wage would kill many jobs as quickly as a snap of the fingers.

Another matter relating to small business is especially important and I have spoken to Treasury Ministers about it. The Government have been extremely supportive of small companies by helping them to expand and by allowing them to keep more in their pockets by lowering the level of taxation.

Mr. Enright: And by helping them to go bankrupt.

Sir Gerrard Neale: The hon. Gentleman should think about how many small businesses there are now compared with 1979. He should remember that there are now relatively more people in employment in this country than all other Europan countries bar one.

The Government deserve congratulation for supporting small companies. Undistributed profits are now taxed at a rate of only 25 per cent. up to a limit of £250,000, and beyond that there is a graded scale up to 37 per cent. That has enormously helped small companies. There remains an inconsistency, however, in respect of unincorporated firms. Once the profit level reaches £23,700, if there is a single proprietor—and whether or not the profit is drawn—the tax level rises from 25 per cent. to 40 per cent. If there are two partners and the profit level is double that I mentioned, the same situation arises.

That disadvantage was clearly identified by the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses, and it could be overcome if undistributed profits made by small unincorporated firms were taxed on the same basis as that applying to incorporated companies. Over a 12-month period, an unincorporated firm would gain enormously, as incorporated businesses do. The money saved could be invested in new equipment, such as computers, or creating new jobs.

I dispute the argument that such an arrangement would be impracticable because there is no set accounting procedure for small, unincorporated businesses. Every such firm keeps accounts, not least for the purposes of calculating value added tax. The Inland Revenue informs me that there are 2·8 million unincorporated businesses, and it estimates that 470,000 of them pay tax at the 40 per cent. rate.

The Government have proved conclusively how welcome have been their successful actions in respect of incorporated businesses, and I ask my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to consider the case of the small unincorporated business sector in future. The Government's policies have secured the great achievement of an inflation rate currently of only 4·1 per cent., and they show every sign of reducing it further.

The Government made it perfectly plain that the process would be extremely painful for many sectors of business, but they clearly explained their policies and their effects. Those policies are working, and it is evident to me and to all my hon. and right hon. Friends that were the country to suffer the misfortune of Labour being elected to power, a Labour Government would never show anything close to the determination displayed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary and the other members of the Treasury team in defending the value of sterling and this country against the high inflation rates that we saw under previous Labour Governments.

5.52 pm

Mr. A. N. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): In making his useful points about small businesses, I am surprised that the hon. Member for Cornwall, North (Sir G. Neale) did not refer also to the penal level of uniform business rate that small firms suffer, involving the projection by the Government of the highest rates of inflation into small business costs for the following year—using the maximum permitted level—instead of exercising the discretion that the Government had to set the business rate at a significantly lower level. That decision has affected businesses of all sizes, and small firms in particular.

Inflation is bad. I am sure that other right hon. and hon. Members have shared my experience of being told by constituents, and by pensioners in particular, every time that the television news announces a fall in inflation, "I don't understand it. They say that inflation is coming down, but prices are rising in the shops that I use."

Any inflation means rising prices, so unless there is zero inflation, we are talking about something that damages the economy in a number of ways. Inflation makes pricing impossible, disguises relative prices, and enables some price rises to be concealed in the general level of increases—and thereby prohibits rational economic decisions being made. Inflation redistributes wealth from the prudent to the profligate. It penalises saving and rewards borrowing.

Inflation makes property a more attractive investment than production, and allows Governments to escape responsibility for their actions. It is not without significance that the two groups that tend to like inflation are those who borrow extremely heavily and see the cost of their debt falling, and Governments who behave imprudently and want to rescue themselves from their actions by printing more money.

Inflation is at the root of all short-termism, and is the enemy of sensible, long-term decisions. One cannot safely predict what to do about business investment and pricing if one does not know what will happen to the future value of the country's currency.

Even modest levels of inflation can be highly significant. Inflation of only 5 per cent. will bring a doubling of prices in 14 years. We should not deceive ourselves that, because inflation is currently running at 4 per cent. to 5 per cent., the problem is solved. The problem remains, and much more must be done.

The Government obviously tabled today's motion to emphasise that Labour does not appear to have any policies for dealing with inflation. However, the debate has the added effect of emphasising that the Government also are short of policies. Let us start, however, with Labour.

Even our old friend credit control has disappeared from Labour's amendment. It must have accepted at long last that credit control is not a feasible or practicable way of containing inflation, and is not something that could reasonably be introduced into the economy. Labour no longer mentions that subject.

[Mr. A. N. Beith]

I did not expect the debate to end with even more doubt being cast on Labour's already weak position on inflation—but it was, by the unwillingness of the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) to answer with a straight yes the question "Would you be prepared to see interest rates increase if that was necessary to defend sterling's position in the exchange rate mechanism?" There were shades of Labour's old attitude to nuclear weapons—"It may be necessary to have them, but we announce now that in no circumstances will we ever use them."

There is no point in being a member of the ERM and having interest rates that, although uncomfortable in their effects, are not as drastic as nuclear weapons if one is not prepared to say that one is prepared to use them.

I accept that the hon. Member for Derby, South believes in Britain keeping its position in the ERM, but her very hesitation is a dangerous signal.

Mr. Enright: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the only way to maintain parity in the exchange rate mechanism is by use of interest rates? That is an interesting economic theory.

Mr. Beith: That is a method which Governments use, and which the present Government have been compelled to employ. Intervention by use of reserves is one such mechanism that must be used in those circumstances. General economic management is another. At the end of the day, however, if one is not prepared to use the interest rate weapon, one might as well not be in the ERM.

Mr. Enright: The hon. Gentleman did not——

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman has a loud voice, but that does not alter the fact that his argument is weak. The hon. Member for Derby, South could have given a simple and straightforward answer, but she did not. It was unwise of her to take that stance.

The Government's problem is that they have two anti-inflation policies. One is membership of the ERM. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has answered questions from me to the effect that he would use interest rates if necessary to maintain this country's position. The other is recession—which is, by the Government's own indications, a temporary mechanism. They do not want recession to continue, but it looks likely to remain for some time. When it ends and recovery arrives, prices will no longer remain as low as they have been recently.

It is incontrovertible that over the Christmas and new year period prices of household goods were lowered, and that had a beneficial effect on the retail prices index. If recessionary conditions change, as we all hope they will, the Government will need other means of controlling inflation, yet they still show no sign of being willing to address that question.

Nor can the Government claim an unblemished record. Britain has one of the worst records for inflation. Since 1950, prices in Britain increased faster than in the United States, Germany, France, Japan, or Canada. Italy apart, Britain has the worst inflation record of all the G7 countries.

The British people have seen the value of their pound reduced under successive Governments, both Conservative and Labour. Since 1950, the pound's value has fallen consistently: a 1950 pound is worth only 7p today, whereas today's German mark and American dollar are worth 32 per cent. and 19 per cent. of their respective 1950 values.

If that record is ever to improve, Britain must adopt a long-term policy to deal with inflation. Our advocacy of an independent central bank, committed to price stability, is the only such policy that is on offer to the British people. I have rarely heard a more compelling demonstration of the case for an independent central bank than that provided by the evasiveness shown today by hon. Member for Derby, South. I should be much happier if I knew that the central bank would decide interest rate policy on the basis of price stability and maintaining sterling's position, and that future Ministers in any party would have nothing to do with that decision—that they would get on with the job of managing fiscal policy and providing the infrastructure that the economy requires.

If control of interest rates were taken out of the hands of politicians and given to an independent central bank, the fight against inflation would be continued all the time, and the problem of Governments going soft on inflation—particularly in the run-up to general elections—would be avoided. Greater stability of prices, interest rates and economic growth would result. Recent studies have concluded that countries with independent central banks typically enjoy lower inflation, irrespective of their political make-up and budgetary policies; and there is no cost in terms of lower growth.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have followed the hon. Gentleman's argument about price stability. Can he tell us what would be his party's policy at this juncture? It appears that he has some plans to raise taxes, but that, surely, would be an irresponsible policy for a country that is moving out of a recession. Will he clarify his party's fiscal policy?

Mr. Beith: It is certainly not irresponsible to invest in the economy now, as we suggest. As was pointed out in a recent report by the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, the best time at which to invest in the public infrastructure is a time of recession. Some of the investment will need to be financed by borrowing, but I regard investment as a much more prudent use of borrowing than tax cuts. Tax cuts ought to be achieved by means of growth, which should bring public finances to a point at which we do not need as much revenue, or revenue is buoyant because of the extent of that growth in the economy.

Surely it is much more prudent to use the means at our disposal to invest now. Such tax cuts as we have proposed have been designed either to make real decisions possible on such matters as the use of energy, or to achieve a better distribution between the richest in society and the poorest. We have made specific proposals—different from Labour's proposals—about the tax scale. Our proposals are designed to enable us to increase pensions and child benefit.

Incidentally, that would probably work into the economy faster than tax cuts granted to the better off. On the whole, people with no money to spend will spend more of what they subsequently gain by way of increases in pensions and benefits.

The absence of any coherent alternative suggests that no one can produce a better method of building in a firm anti-inflation policy than central bank independence. Already, the Government are becoming complacent about

their inflation policy. The Prime Minister claimed that he had inflation licked—although prices were still rising at a rate of more than 4 per cent. a year, and although the recent reductions have taken place during the longest recession since the 1930s and could easily be reversed in the event of a recovery. Prices have more than doubled since May 1979; the pound of May 1979 is worth only 41p in 1992.

Labour scarcely mentions inflation in its economic policy documents. I do not think that the party sees inflation as a problem: I do not think that it recognises the corrosive effects of inflation to which I referred at the beginning of my speech. Labour appears to have abandoned the policy of credit controls, for instance.

Having read the motion and the amendment, we find that we are left with the only coherent alternative—an alternative that we shall probably use in the end in any event. The Government have given us to understand that, if we joined the European monetary system and a single currency were introduced, that currency would have to be operated by an independent central bank. The Chancellor has been quite clear about that. He said in the House that, in stage 3, the European central bank

"would have to be free to set interest rates without interference. That is the view of every member state."—[*Official Report*, 21 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. 517.]

Clearly, the Chancellor has accepted that a European single currency could not be run without an independent central bank. Why should we not enjoy that advantage now? Why should we not say, here and now, that the central bank would exercise independent responsibility for monetary policy, having price stability as its objective?

That would be a much better position to adopt for an Opposition party entering an election. It would be helpful if people knew that, during an election campaign and subsequently, a central bank would exercise that independent responsibility. The Government might do the country a service. If they are so worried about the consequences of other parties' coming into office, why do they not build that in now as part of a firm, permanent anti-inflation policy?

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Maples): Surely there is a difference between an independent central bank that is running a single currency —I do not think that there is any practical alternative to that—and the Government of the day continuing to be responsible to the House of Commons for monetary policy when running their own currency. I follow the hon. Gentleman's argument about the independent central bank; indeed, some examples, such as the Bundesbank, work extremely well. Does he not agree, however, that some non-independent central banks—such as those in Japan and France—seem to work equally well?

Mr. Beith: Japan's central bank has gradually increased its independence from Government, and that has contributed to Japan's control of inflation. Let us take the example of countries that simply have more independent central banks than we have. The United States Federal Reserve, for instance, is not an independent central bank in the full sense of the term, but it has still been able to produce a better inflation record—even with its high public-sector deficits—than we have managed in this country. Generally, the record seems favourable.

As the Economic Secretary pointed out, there is a difference between running a single currency for Europe and running our own domestic currency. There is a practical difference: taking instructions from 12 or more Governments would be even worse than taking instructions from one Government. A central bank will be in a much better position if, on this issue, it takes no instructions from Governments. The present Government are denying themselves a permanent contribution to anti-inflation policy by refusing to embody that principle in our system.

There are many other ways in which we should fight inflation. We should fight it by increasing our manufacturing capacity; we should fight it by promoting competition, and by ensuring that we do not have the rigged markets that exist now in some of the privatised utilities, where genuine competition has not been allowed to develop. Competition is crucial to keeping prices down. At the end of the day, however, the only firm and reliable anchor is an independent central bank, and we shall continue to advocate it until, eventually, the country gets it.

6.6 pm

Mr. Dudley Fishburn (Kensington): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who could justly claim—perhaps alone—that when his party was last in power, before Britain came off the gold standard, inflation rates were very much more stable and sensible than they are today.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North (Sir G. Neale) said earlier, the remarkable control of inflation that has been exercised over the past 18 months is a real tribute to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who made it clear that that would be his top priority when he got the job. Moreover, it was he who, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, took us into the exchange rate mechanism —a discipline that has done so much to squeeze out inflation from our economy in the long term and, notwithstanding the prevarications of Opposition Front Benchers, will continue to do so.

Interestingly, in those first speeches when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister determined the need to control inflation, he made the point that is so seldom made: inflation is, above all, a social cruelty. It hurts parts of our society that are often overlooked in the great economic debates. It hurts the quiet: those who save, the elderly and others who are often at the greatest disadvantage. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was right to say that that was one of the main reasons to control inflation.

The previous Prime Minister also believed strongly in the need to control inflation, but she took her eye off the ball. Had she but done what the German Chancellor did so frequently, and looked at the back pages of *The Economist* every week, she would have seen that the broad gauge of monetary growth in 1987, 1988 and 1989 was running away at a rate that was much greater than the economic growth of the time. Even though economic growth in those years was strong, at about 4 per cent. a year, none the less monetary growth was between three and four times the rate of our real economic growth.

There is no mystery about inflation. If the rate of increase in the amount of money keeps pace with the growth of domestic output, there is no inflation. If, however, the increase in the amount of money runs ahead of the increase in gross domestic output, there is inflation. The likelihood is that we shall have real growth in the

[Mr. Dudley Fishburn]

economy of about 2 per cent. in the year ahead. If the money supply grows by about 6 per cent. in the year ahead, then, as sure as eggs is eggs, inflation will be about 4 per cent.

The chance now before us—the success of the past 18 months has led to that chance—is to reach out and grab not stability at 4 per cent. but stability at 0 per cent. inflation: to have a system in this country, as other countries have had so frequently in the past, under which the value of money and the price of a basket of consumer goods do not change from year to year. We shall look ahead, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Sir I. Stewart) so clearly said, to the long term without the short-term uncertainty that creates its own disparities.

I was delighted to hear the speech of the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), not least because, as always with him, there was that great historic reach. He went back through Alexander Pope to Oliver Cromwell. If we were to return to a time of 0 per cent. inflation, it would be, on any historic basis, a return to normality. It is broadly true to say that, from the time of the Restoration after Oliver Cromwell until the outbreak of the first world war 250 years later, consumer prices in Britain remained stable. That is not to say that prices in Britain did not change within that general overall basket. Of course they did. For example, there was the dramatic collapse in the price of wheat in the 19th century which, in itself, led to the industrial wealth of that century.

When there is stability within a currency, leading to stability of prices overall, there can of course be great changes in individual parts of the economy. It is interesting to note that throughout the 19th century—the time of greatest industrial wealth and expansion in this country—when things were changing with every passing decade, there was, none the less, complete price stability. From the start of the 19th century to its end there was no change. I recall the famous anecdote of the Duke of Wellington who, in 1933, sold some land that his ancestor had bought on returning home triumphant from the battle of Waterloo. He sold, for exactly the same price sterling, exactly the same amount of land as the first Duke of Wellington had purchased.

The real increase in inflation started when we abandoned the gold standard in the 1930s. Since then, the value of the pound has fallen catastrophically—to about 2·5 per cent. of its value in 1933. However, the chance to reach out and grab true stability—0 per cent. inflation—will take great political courage. In a sense, inflation is like valium. It creates an easy sense of well-being. One can do nothing very much, yet one can feel that things are jogging along nicely.

It is in that drugged state that many savers say that they like inflation. It gives them the illusion of a high rate of return on their investment. House owners may say that they like inflation because it wipes out their debt and seems to give them a capital increase on their main investment. Some companies pretend at times to like inflation because it gives them a seemingly effortless ability to increase turnover and profit. Worst of all, though, Governments occasionally say that they like inflation because it allows them to hand out excessive public spending year after year without having to pay the true cost.

No party likes inflation more than the Labour party. When the Labour party was in power, it was what can only be described as an inflation junky, with prices rising year after year, way beyond 5 per cent. inflation—which gives that easy, if illusory, feeling of well-being—to about 20 per cent. inflation, which led to economic catastrophe.

We now all know—it is not a matter of debate—that the sense of ease that even low inflation gives is wholly illusory. It undermines Britain's wealth year after year. Even 4 or 5 per cent. inflation, which seems to be so attractive, undermines and, in the course of 20 years, almost eradicates the existing wealth of the country—the wealth that has been built up over generations. Even worse than that, it blunts the ability and the zest of those people who are able to create wealth in our society, for the benefit of us all.

There are only two ways in which we shall fail to reach this chance of price stability, of zero inflation. The first is devaluation. One hesitates to say it, but I think that the reply that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed gave this afternoon increases the likelihood that we shall have a sterling devaluation, or that there will be uncertainty over sterling in the years ahead.

Mr. Beith: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that was the reply that I elicited from the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett)?

Mr. Fishburn: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for not having made that clear.

The risk of devaluation is one of the ways in which we can be sure that our inflation norm of 0 per cent. cannot be reached. Devaluation would not make this country more competitive. It would make higher interest rates a certainty—a spectre that would cast its shadow for years ahead. It would also mean that once again we would absorb other countries' inflation through higher import costs. Membership of the exchange rate mechanism, to which the Government are so strongly committed, puts the risk of devaluation behind us, so long as the Government remain in power.

As for the second way in which inflation could take off again, an increase in our domestic money supply could come about as a result of excessive Government-induced wage increases in the public sector which have shot ahead of wage increases in the private sector. If we can hold on to the idea that, having reduced inflation to 4 per cent., we can, together with the other countries of Europe, reduce it to the point where there is constant stability, the prize ahead of us will be enormous.

We must not, however, risk becoming number blind. Even if we hold inflation at 4 per cent., we must be aware of the fact that a 6 per cent. pay settlement will be 50 per cent. above the rate of inflation, that a 20 per cent. increase in the community charge will be five times the rate of inflation and that increases in council rents of, say, 16 per cent. will be four times the rate of inflation.

As inflation becomes ever lower, the demand that it makes upon us is that we should not be figure blind and that we should concentrate on the smallest increase in inflation rates. The prize of zero inflation is clear: that we shall have ever lower unit production costs, which will make our exports more competitive. The prize is long-term planning. For the first time, the attraction of short-termism—the ability to take profit now because of the uncertainties of the future—will be diminished. People will

say to themselves, "I can invest for 10 years in the knowledge that the underlying value of the money that I invest over that decade will not change." Of course, it will increase the well-being of the people because every increase in wages earned in an economy with 0 per cent. inflation is real wealth and not merely an illusion.

Inflation benefits the debtor and penalises the creditor. As society becomes older, as shown in its age profile, so the public will tend to become more a public of savers and less a public of borrowers. They will demand increasingly that we do not allow inflation to rise, as it has done so frequently in the past. Most of all, to keep inflation still and to aim towards the 0 per cent. target will require a political will which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has shown. For that reason, I believe that the country will show where its support for him lies.

6.20 pm

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): I remind hon. Members that the motion starts by inviting the House, at the Government's behest, to congratulate the Government "on its"—

that is, the Government's—

"prudent economic policies".

That anyone should invite the Government to congratulate even themselves on their economic policies is the height of breathtaking cheek. It is the ultimate in chutzpah. It is the most monstrous zenith of shamelessness. The Government are inviting the House to congratulate them on their economic policies when those policies have created a totally unnecessary recession, depression and slump which are ravaging the country. That is a matter of not just statistics but of human suffering.

I wish to hold up my constituency, my city of Leicester and my county of Leicestershire, as a mirror, because I know it best. Of course high inflation is bad news, but low inflation is a disaster when it is at the cost of vast unemployment, a massive collapse of businesses, large and small, mortgage misery and repossessions on an unparalleled scale, poll tax chaos and crime leading to social misery and the breakdown of the lives of far too many families.

A year ago, when the position was only starting to get really bad, *The Sunday Times* said:

"Any fool can reduce inflation when the economy is flat on its back."

Our economy, which the Government say that they have managed prudently, is not just flat on its back; it is prostrate. It is knocked out for the count. It is destroying the lives, security, homes and happiness of millions. Yet the Government say that the House should congratulate them on what they have done.

Jobs do not mean just the right of people to go out to work; they mean the dignity of work, the ability to earn a living and the right not to be in debt. In the east midlands, 49,000 jobs were lost last year, 29,000 of them in manufacturing industries. Manufacturing industry is on its back. It is in the worst mess that it has ever been in.

My dad, who was Member of Parliament for my seat—yes, I have an hereditary seat, of which I am proud—used to say, "Don't worry, my boy, about Leicester. It will be all right, because in Leicester we make what people have to have—hosiery, knitwear and shoes. They cannot go without them. In the last slump in the 1930s, Leicester was fine. Don't worry, my boy. Leicester is the second most prosperous city in Europe". My poor father would turn in his grave if he knew what was happening today. Hosiery, knitwear and footwear are all dying. The traditional industries of our city are prostrate and jobs are falling away.

Since 1979, when the Government came into power, unemployment in Leicester has risen by 174 per cent. That is the second highest rise in the country. In my constituency, unemployment rose by 37 per cent. in the last year. That is not just a statistic: it means human misery and disaster.

Anyone who doubts that should come to my surgeries to meet the people who come to seek help. In the past, those were often manual workers, people without skills. Such people may have no special skills to sell, but they are just as entitled to jobs as brilliant people emerging from universities and technical colleges.

Recently, three professional people have come to my surgery. One was an accountant who had been employed in a major accountancy firm in the City and who had come back home to Leicester for family reasons; he could not get a job. A second accountant had been told by the local job centre that, because he was under 5 ft, he was too small, and that was why he could not get a job. That was ridiculous.

When we consider how difficult it is for people of average height, with average intelligence, to get jobs, what a terrible time it is for the disabled, the sick, the handicapped and people with learning difficulties who have to compete in the same market. There are no jobs for them. For that we get low inflation. Thank you very much. I prefer higher inflation and jobs for my constituents.

It is not just the unemployed and the ordinary workers, as they are sometimes called, who have a problem. Some of the worst sufferers now are people who have never been unemployed in their lives. For the first six months, they cannot get help from the Government because of the rules. They cannot even get on training schemes, and they do not know how to cope.

I am president of an organisation called the Retired Executives Action Clearing House, REACH. It is a fine, non-political organisation which looks for jobs for people who were retired early, when in their prime. They want to do something constructive even if they are not paid. People are entitled to jobs when they are young, but as I approach middle age I think that jobs for older people are also important. Why should not people have jobs? We are told that it would create higher inflation and that the cost is too high. The cost of low inflation is too high and is ravaging the lives of too many of my constituents.

As to business failures, there was a 79·4 per cent. increase in the east midlands last year. There was a 96·5 per cent. rise in bankruptcies. Do the Government know that? These were honest, decent business people who have gone bust. They could not pay their debts. When they go down, they pull other people down with them. Those innocent people all suffer because the Government, who are inviting us to congratulate them on their economic policy of all things, do not know how to manage a corner shop. It is a disgrace. The east midlands has become the worst region for business failures, and it is the Government's fault. Firms large and small are going out of business unnecessarily. That is the cost of low inflation.

I always thought that people were entitled to homes. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) is wearing a daffodil.

[Mr. Greville Janner]

"The land, the land, it was God that gave the land, God that gave land to the people."

That was another of my father's ditties. People are entitled to a roof over their heads. What has happened, all in the name of low inflation? House prices have collapsed. That is not all right for those who happen to own houses, especially if the house is a family's entire wealth. If someone wants to sell his house so that he can get on his bicycle and go to look for another job, he is stuck because he cannot sell.

People who have bought their houses, including council houses, cannot pay their mortgages. What happens then, in the name of low inflation? In 1991, 716 possession orders were made in Leicester county court—an increase of 48 per cent. on 1990. People who were entitled to have homes lost them. There are no rented houses because, in the name of low inflation, local authorities are not allowed to build houses. They cannot even use the money they get from those that they have sold. So people have no jobs, no businesses and no homes. That is the price of low inflation, and the Government say that we must congratulate them on their record.

They say that they are the Government of law and order. In the name of low inflation, they do not want high pay or too many policemen, although we have a few more than we used to. In Leicester, the number of police may have increased by 10 per cent., but crime has increased by 187 per cent. since 1979. I asked the Home Secretary

"by what number, and by what percentage, reported (a) criminal offences and (b) crimes of violence have increased in Leicestershire since May 1979."

The Minister said:

"The available information compares the 12 months to June 1979 with the 12 months to June 1991".

They do not want to give us the figures for the next nine months—I do not blame them—because the figures have got much worse.

The answer went on:

"Between these periods, the total of notifiable offences in Leicestershire increased by 52,906".

There was an increase from 29,481 to 82,387.

"crimes of violence increased by 2,245."—[*Official Report*, 25 February 1992; Vol. 204, c. *421-22*.]

There was an increase from 1,823 to 4,068. Although I asked for the percentage, the Government did not provide it, because it does not sound good. It is an increase of 300 per cent. Crime is burgeoning and our social fabric is collapsing. People do not have homes, jobs or businesses, but we are asked to congratulate the Government on their economic policies. What a cheek.

The Government should be slung out, not congratulated. Recession is when other people are out of work, depression is when you yourself are out of work, and recovery is when the Government are out of work.

6.32 pm

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): The debate on inflation is particularly well timed just before the Budget. Most people—not all—recognise that inflation is undesirable. The hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) referred to high inflation as bad news and low inflation as worse. He is not alone in thinking that.

Mr. Janner: The hon. Gentleman is a distinguished Member, but he was not listening properly. I said that high inflation is bad news but low inflation is a disaster when it is at the cost of vast unemployment, massive collapse of businesses, large and small, mortgage misery, repossession of homes, poll tax chaos, crime and breakdown of families. I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for giving me an opportunity to repeat that.

Sir David Mitchell: If the hon. and learned Gentleman does not think that a "disaster" is even worse, I am not sure what is. On a number of other occasions during his speech—I noted them—he made it clear that he does not regard a little inflation as particularly undesirable.

Many people recognise that inflation damages savings and pensioners. It has an effect on wage claims and on industrial costs. It damages the ability of industry to be able to compete in world markets, particularly industries that deal with forward orders where they have to estimate their costs. It damages the farming industry where selling prices remain static but costs rise continually.

I hope that the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West will be prepared to consider that there is another hidden effect that is more insidious, damaging, debilitating and, ultimately, more serious. Inflation is the first call on the profits of any and every business. For example, a corner shop may have £5,000 worth of stock on its shelves. If inflation is 10 per cent., next year it must have £5,500 worth of stock if it is to have the same number of packets of cereals and tins on the shelves. The profits will have to be used simply to maintain the amount of stock. A small engineering works may have £1 million worth of work in progress. It could be in Leicester, Andover, Basingstoke or wherever. If inflation is 10 per cent., it would need another £100,000 simply to have the same amount of work in progress a year later. Where would that £100,000 come from? It means that money that should be spent on research, development and investment is used simply to keep pace with inflation.

The hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West said that he would prefer inflation to be a bit higher. Damage would be caused by that because our competitors could spend their money on research, development and investment and so become more competitive. In the world of high inflation, that cannot be done. The first call on every penny is used only to keep the business intact.

Inflation has a cumulative effect. Over the past five years cumulative inflation has been just over 35 per cent. That means, with £1 million worth of work in progress, £350,000 has not been spent on research, development and investment. Inflation damages industry's ability to stay fit and competitive.

To be specific, the cumulative figure for inflation over the past five years is 35·6 per cent. I hope that the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West will recall that the cumulative figure for the last five years of the previous Labour Government was 100·7 per cent. If a business had £1 million worth of work in progress, after five years of a Labour Government it would need £2 million. That would simply finance the work in progress, the purchase of raw materials and so on. The hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West seems to forget the effect that that has on the ability to invest in modern machinery and equipment.

It is no wonder that British industry was on its back when the Labour Government left office in 1979. The cost is far greater than the hon. and learned Gentleman seems to realise. He said that the cost of low inflation is too high.

It may be insidious and may not appear immediately on the surface, but in the long term, high inflation is the most damaging thing for any country's economy.

I regret that the Opposition have not taken this opportunity to explain how or whether they would tackle inflation. It is clear that the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West does not regard it as a high priority. He spelled out what he sees as the damage brought about by trying to get inflation down. In the long run, every business in his constituency, as in mine, is severely undermined by a failure to bring down inflation and to keep it down.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, given my interest in small businesses, you will not be surprised to hear that I wish to refer to the contribution that small businesses make in terms of jobs, wealth creation and a broader tax base. As they grow in number, the revenue to the Exchequer grows and its ability to finance the many other things that we all want is stronger. The contribution of small businesses was not always as widely recognised. Those of us who, in the past, have played a role in reminding people of the value and importance of the contribution of small businesses are pleased to see that it is more widely recognised. All businesses, large and small, suffer from the effects of inflation. All incorporated businesses have benefited from the reductions in corporation tax introduced by the Government. That enables business to grow. However, those corporation tax cuts from 45 per cent. to 35 per cent. for large businesses and to 25 per cent. for small businesses do not apply to unincorporated businesses. My hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North (Sir G. Neale) said that this is a serious aspect of taxation, because while a small incorporated business pays corporation tax at 25 per cent. an unincorporated business pays at 40 per cent. Unincorporated businesses are the seed-corn of our future prosperity—the smallest businesses that have just started that are beginning to move, to be the springboard from which they grow—yet they must pay more tax. It is not beyond the wit of man, the Treasury and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in the Budget to devise a means by which investment within an unincorporated business is allowed for tax. That would offset the disadvantage that they suffer under existing arrangements.

In the past two years, many small businesses have gone into liquidation, ceased trading or gone bankrupt. Many did so because they could not find the resources to offset the cost of inflation. I understand the complaints of the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West because the businesses of my constituents have also gone into liquidation, but how often did they do so because they did not have enough money to finance the orders that they could get?

Mr. Radice: I remind the hon. Gentleman, who has been making an interesting speech, of the small problem for small businesses of very high interest rates. The hon. Gentleman would not be fair to his own case if he did not point that out.

Sir David Mitchell: High interest rates are the price that we must pay to reduce inflation, but once it has been reduced high interest rates will not continue. We have had a series of reductions in interest rates as inflation has come down, and as it lowers further more reductions will be made. I urge my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer not to forget the unincorporated business in his Budget.

The Chancellor has been more successful in squeezing out inflation than he has been given credit for. In January, inflation was recorded at 4·1 per cent., but that figure covers 12 months. Who would choose a map of where he has been to decide where he is now? If one looks at where my right hon. Friend is now and takes the figure for the past three months, one finds that, annualised, the figure is not 4·1 per cent. but only 1·5 per cent. The annualised figure for December to January shows a fall of 0·8 per cent. It is true that in the past 12 months we have had an increase of 4·1 per cent., but the reality is that the figure is now substantially lower. That is an immensely important victory, bought at, the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) will agree, a very high price. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House agree that, having paid that price and reduced inflation, we should not take the risk of overheating the economy again.

Finally, I wish to mention an aspect which I see as a uniquely British engine of inflation—house prices. As the economy picks up, there will be a substantial increase in demand——

Mr. Janner: When?

Sir David Mitchell: Hindsight is the only exact science known to man. Foretelling the future is more difficult. Leading economists who advise banks say that later this year the economy will pick up. I have no insider knowledge, except that the experts tell me that that is likely to happen. When it happens, as assuredly it will, one of the signs will be an increase in demand for housing. There is a pent-up demand for housing among young people who, when they obtain better work, will want to buy a house.

But if we do not increase the supply of land with planning consent, that increased demand for housing will send land prices up and, as it does so, it will provide additional collateral for people to borrow against the higher value of their house. At least one county planning officer believes that he can suspend the law of supply and demand in his county and that an increased supply of land will not help to keep the price of land down. That is a disastrous approach. I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to play his part in this. Land worth between £1,500 and £2,000 an acre is, with planning consent, worth £300,000 an acre. That engine for inflation of short supply of land must not be let loose on the country as it comes to the end of recession and grows in prosperity in the years ahead.

6.45 pm

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): I have sat here all afternoon and I was disappointed by the way in which the Chief Secretary made his speech. He made it clear to Labour Members that he was not interested in getting inflation down. He said that bearing down on inflation was the cornerstone and responsibility of the Government. After the next election, it will be their tombstone.

I represent one of the poorest constituencies in Scotland. Unemployment is probably the highest in Britain, at about 24 per cent., although the Government estimate it at between 16 and 17 per cent. Other statistics tell a different story. At great length, the Chief Secretary went back to the 1970s, when inflation was 31 per cent. He did not remind the House that when the Labour Government left office inflation had been reduced to 7·8 per cent.

[Mr. Jimmy Wray]

Despite all the revenue from Scottish oil, the Government have failed. It must be embarassing for them to have to defend the way in which they have treated the people of this country. The nation now realises the mistake that it has made and how it has been conned, tricked and lied to by Conservative Members. The Chief Secretary did not give the true state of the country. It is a matter not only of inflation—if it were, that would be easy to remedy—but of stabilising prices, which the Government have never been able to do.

Let us look at the state of the country as the Tories will be leaving it to a Labour Government. Inflation has reached 4·1 per cent. From 7·1 per cent. in 1979, it rose to a peak of 10·1 per cent. Should we really trust the Government when they say that they are going for zero inflation? What a piece of nonsense. Any economist will say that a country that aims for zero inflation should take advice and should probably aim for 1 or 2 per cent. to oil the machinery, but the Government have not taken advice from anyone.

The Minister failed to tell the nation how the Government lied in 1983 when inflation was 3·7 per cent. The Government said that they were tackling inflation and aiming for a zero rate, but that was when they were expecting to get re-elected. They had been back in power only two years when inflation increased to 7 per cent. Two years after they had been re-elected in 1987, inflation doubled to 8·3 per cent. Now, in 1992, the Government are hanging on until the last day and there are some faces that we shall not see again. I think that inflation will be trebled if the Conservatives are returned to power—it will go back to 9 per cent.

It was sad that the Minister mentioned Germany when he asked whether any Government had an inflation rate of 1 per cent. He knows that the slump in the German economy has been caused by the reunification of east and west.

He failed to tell the nation that, although inflation is still running at 4·1 per cent., food prices have increased this year by 4·5 per cent. Household services such as postage and telephone bills have increased by 7·8 per cent. and motor prices by 9·1 per cent. Unless the Government can tackle those problems, we shall fall further into a slump.

The Minister did not tell us about the underlying rate of inflation. In 1990, it was 5·6 per cent., but that was without the mortgage interest rate. In 1991, we had the highest inflation rate—5·9 per cent.—of the seven major western economies, including Canada, the United States, Germany, France and Italy, whose inflation rates were hovering at 3 per cent. and 4 per cent.

The Government talk about recession, but they are not interested in the state of the country. They created this recession—that is the way in which they work. They are not interested in the people of this country—if they had been, they would never have allowed the country to get into such a serious state. It annoys me when a Minister defends the policy of a Government who are in ruins. We have the statistics, and the media are explaining them to the nation.

The Government hope that possibly by encouraging independence in Scotland they will be able to slip in the back door, but the Scottish people are a red-blooded nation, compassionate and caring. Do the Government honestly believe that the Scottish people would allow the people of England, Ireland and Wales beside whom they have fought and died over hundreds of years to return the Conservatives to power? The Scottish people will vote Labour, and all the rhetoric about independence will go out of the window. A member of the Scottish National party said that we would have a Scottish army. Another said that we would have 50 embassies. But we have hundreds of embassies. We are international socialists.

Poverty and homelessness on the banks of the Clyde are the same as poverty and homelessness on the banks of the Thames, the Rhine or anywhere else, because Europe is uniting. There are now 12 countries in the European Community. Malta, Cyprus, Greece, Spain and Czechoslovakia are now joining it. The hon. Member for Cornwall, North (Sir G. Neale), who is no longer here, referred to the exchange rate mechanism. He said that institutions would withdraw their money from this country, but why will they do that when we are in the ERM?

The Government must get rid of the slums and the poverty that they have created in Britain—10 million people are living in poverty and 180,000 are homeless. If one goes to Centre Point in Soho, one can see the effect of the policies adopted by the Government. They took away income support from 16 and 17-year-olds. In that age group the homelessness rate has now risen to 77 per cent. That is proof of the Government's mistakes. We want a Government who are compassionate and believe in helping the poor, but this Government have failed to do that.

The Government believe in the hierarchy. They are now shouting about the minimum wage, but I did not hear them shouting about the wage increases for those in the hierarchy. Giving people £3·40 an hour means that those people can spend more. If they can spend more, there are more tax revenues and that in turn leads to increased growth. The way to get rid of inflation is to create jobs and to give people more so that they can spend more.

The mathematician on the Government Front Bench thinks that he is a comedian—does he think that he is as funny as Arthur Askey? He referred to Polly the Parrot. That is not the serious stuff that we shall accept from a Minister when the country is in crisis. The Government have been advised by economists that short-term policies will not work. We need long-termism to speed growth in gross national product and gross domestic product, but the Government have failed badly and stuck to high interest charges. The ideal inflation rate is 0 per cent.—in fact, it might be less than that.

We are worried about fraud and bias and the way in which the Government have conned the nation. My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) made it clear that the Government lied. They said that they wanted people to own their own homes. In 1987, that was the banner under which they fought. They said that every member of society should own his own home. People went to borrow money from the Abbey National and other agencies at a rate of 9 per cent. No sooner were they in their homes, putting on a light and later trying to get a night's sleep when the interest rates went up to 16 per cent. Some 70,500 people have been turfed out of their homes. What are the Government doing about that? Nothing. They have been told about it day in and day out, but they have done nothing.

There are 2·6 million unemployed people, and that is a lot of people. It is very sad when people in my constituency ask when the recession will end. I cannot tell them because we are in such a mess that it will take a long time to get us out of it. Some people in my constituency have never had a job. All that they wait for on a Monday morning is for the giro to come through the door. The only difference between grass and a giro is that, although both are green, one feeds the cattle and one feeds a human being. Some people will never get a job because they are over 50 or 60 and have never had a job under this Government. They have no chance of getting one. Consequently, repossessions take place every day.

Perhaps there are some hidden talents in the Government which have never come to light. They have had three shots and three Chancellors but every Chancellor has either given in or not done the job.

Let us consider the way in which the Government have treated the people of England and Scotland with regard to the poll tax. An extra £14 billion was thrown down the drain. It cost every poll tax payer an extra £178. Those are the hidden costs that no one talks about. The Government are letting the poll tax still run on. They could have abolished it already, but they did not because they knew that youngsters were not putting their names on the register and that there was an election coming up.

What the Government have done to this nation's utilities is a scandal. They have taken our prime resources out of the hands of the many and sold them off to the few. No wonder the senior citizens are shouting about surcharges of £190 at the end of the year, to be paid for out of their poor pensions. Naturally, they wonder what a Labour Government would do. A Labour Government would raise taxes to 50 per cent. for the very rich. It is surely better to tax high earners—those earning more than £30,000—than to give them scandalous rebates of £300 or £400. How could any human being do that? Conservative policy is to give the richest people tax relief. I wonder how Conservatives will explain to the nation why they have so badly treated pensioners, the unemployed and the poor people who have to pay 20 per cent. of the poll tax while they live on scraps. No decent politician would stand for that.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Would the hon. Gentleman support the Government if they introduced a generous scheme of rebates or discounts for those who live alone? When the council tax was introduced, Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen opposed the granting of such discounts to pensioners and others living alone, but would the hon. Gentleman support the idea?

Mr. Wray: Yes, we would support it—if the Government got it right, but they are giving rebates to millionaires as well. That is why we oppose the idea. We would certainly give rebates to senior citizens, and we are committed to increasing their pensions, for single people and for couples, by £5 and £8 respectively. That is not a lot but it is a start—it is more than the Tories ever gave them. We will also increase child benefit by a few pounds—the Government froze it for many years.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that since the Conservatives came to power in 1979 Strathclyde has lost more than half its manufacturing jobs—166,000 of them. As a result, repossessions on an unprecedented scale have been taking place in Scotland and our young people have had to go on to the streets because they have no homes—the Government have savagely reduced the money allocated to council houses and the number of available council houses. Does my hon. Friend agree that Strathclyde has suffered enough under this dramatically bad Government?

Mr. Wray: Yes. That is why business people in Scotland and England have been gathering in the past two or three months and saying that they would rather back a Labour Government with sound policies than a Government who do not believe in investing in manufacturing, training, technology or anything else.

I am grateful for having had the opportunity to speak in the debate.

7.4 pm

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): The hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) made a typically robust speech but I am not certain whether his agenda for a Labour Government necessarily coincides with the views of his Front-Bench spokesmen. It is not without significance that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), when describing her interpretation of the sequence of events between 1974 and 1979, did not refer to the role of the International Monetary Fund in determining Labour's financial policies. It was a humiliating experience for this country when the IMF imposed conditions and restraints on us. I hope that that will never happen again, whichever party is in power.

The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) mentioned the courtesies of this House. There have been few occasions over the years when he and I have agreed on the remedy for political or economic recovery for this country, but we have always agreed on the urgent need for our football team, Plymouth Argyle, to make an immediate recovery so as to avoid relegation from the second division this year.

No one should ever doubt the need to minimise the adverse effects of inflationary tendencies in the economy. At worst, inflation can devastate an economy and undermine the whole fabric of society. That was the worst experience of Germany after the first world war. Certain countries in the third world are experiencing similar phenomena now.

Under the last Labour Government we experienced inflation rates in excess of 20 per cent. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary said that the average inflation in the five years of Labour control was 15 per cent. Due to the external influence of the IMF, restraints were introduced following the wages explosion under the auspices of the so-called social contract. It seems a long time since we went through that experience, but many of my constituents, especially the middle-aged and the elderly, remember the adverse effects. That was undoubtedly an unhappy period.

During a period of high inflation it may seem that people are superficially better off because of pay or pension increases, but we all know from personal experience that few people or businesses are better off. I offer two examples of this; they are of particular relevance given that we may be on the election hustings in the near future. During the mid-1970s, teachers were granted a significant pay increase following the Houghton review. That was to be welcomed; it was an acknowledgment of

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the work that teachers undertook for society. But within a couple of years the positive advances represented by that pay increase were eliminated by inflation.

Secondly, the effects on people who depended on pensions and fixed incomes were striking. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North (Sir G. Neale), I represent a constituency in which more than 20 per cent. of the electorate fall into that category. I know from my constituency casework at the time how rapidly people's incomes were eroded in real terms. They retired on what they perceived to be a reasonable income, sufficient to maintain an acceptable standard of living. If their pensions, however, were not subject to automatic review —only a minority in those days enjoyed such pensions —they soon found themselves in genuine financial difficulties.

The Government have been right to concentrate on the need to keep inflation under control. There have been variations. At times during the past 13 years, we have been more successful than at others, but since 1979 inflation has averaged about 7 per cent., half the rate under the previous Labour Government.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North mentioned, especially since my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) became Prime Minister, we have had to manage the economy against a difficult international background. We have had to take difficult and harsh decisions. It has not been easy for the country as a whole, but the present signs such as average earnings, the level of pay settlements and factory gate prices show that we have become more competitive and thus able to take advantage of any upturn that may occur in the level of world trade and economic activity.

Mr. Graham: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that this Government had an incredible windfall from North sea oil and gas, and from the money they reaped from privatisation? The hon. Gentleman referred to the period of the Labour Government when oil prices quadrupled and we did not have our own oil. We were forced into doing things that we would not necessarily have liked to have done. That was true international pressure. Although the Government have reaped the rewards of oil, gas and privatisation, we still have unemployment raging into the millions. How can the Government continue like that after 13 years?

Mr. Hicks: I know the relative impact made on the constituents whom I have represented while I have had the honour to be a Member of Parliament. I have been a Member of Parliament under two Conservative Governments. Some rather critical remarks were made earlier about the first Conservative Prime Minister under whom I served—the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). There is no doubt that when it comes to standards of economic management and to making the best use of the resources at one's disposal, this Government's performance, especially in the past 18 months or so, has been much better than before. I wholeheartedly support the decisions made in the past 18 months.

It has been suggested in the debate that, given the more favourable climate, encouragement might be given in certain sectors to stimulating the level of economic demand without prejudicing the inflation position. Several of my colleagues have made suggestions to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. May I suggest three areas in which a modest boost might be given which, in my view, would not jeopardise the Government's counter-inflation strategy? I do not refer to tax cuts because I am not convinced that that is the best way forward now.

First, we must consider carefully a relaxation of the restraint on local authority capital receipts for low-cost social housing and other specialist housing, such as that for the elderly, for the disabled and for the single homeless. If that could be accompanied by a relaxation of the conditions governing eligibility for home repair and improvement grants, it would be helpful for the housing and construction industry and it would have an immediate, beneficial effect.

Secondly, we must resolve once and for all the procedures governing payments to this country from European regional development fund sources. There is still confusion. In the Plymouth travel-to-work area, of which my constituency is a part, there is still uncertainty about whether we shall be able to take up the full allocation under the RENAVAL programme. At present, we have been able to take up only £3·5 million of £11 million. That has still not been confirmed.

Thirdly, many references have been made to the pressures currently placed on smaller business enterprises. If there are surplus funds at the disposal of the Chancellor, there is a strong case for easing the financial overheads placed on the smaller business units through a freezing of this year's projected increase in the level of the uniform business rate. If hon. Members, whether Opposition Members or Conservative colleagues, are criticial of me for suggesting that, I respectfully remind the House that I was the Conservative Member who, when the uniform business rate was discussed in the House, tabled an amendment suggesting that the transitional period for the new arrangements should be extended from five years to 10 years. I could foresee the genuine problems that smaller business units would face in the short term as a consequence of what may well be a desirable, long-term objective.

I am certain that when we come to the crucial day, which may be sooner rather than later, the country will be in no doubt about the respective merits, based on actual performance, of the two major political parties. All Conservative Members have an obligation to ensure that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is returned not only with a majority sufficient to give him the ability to form a future Administration, but with a majority large enough that he does not have to worry about the position of the minority parties or about a hung Parliament.

7.17 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): We have heard a characteristically attractive and honest speech from the hon. Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks). I am sure that he will forgive me if I do not take up all his points, although I will refer to one or two as I go along.

When the Government chose to have a debate on inflation, I hoped that we should learn how a Conservative Government, if elected, would improve on their poor inflation record during this Parliament. I hoped that we should also learn how a Conservative Government,

committed to a balanced budget, would justify having a public sector borrowing requirement of more than £20 billion. I hoped that we should also learn how a Conservative Government would get us out of recession. We have heard none of that from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Instead, we heard a speech of astonishing vacuity and triviality—a speech almost empty of serious content.

Only a party facing defeat at a general election would have launched such a debate—and in such a manner. Only a Government without a sense of shame would have called a debate about inflation. Of course we all welcome the decline in inflation from its double figures high point in 1990. It certainly demonstrates the effectiveness of the exchange rate mechanism, which many of us have supported for a long time, or British membership of it, as a framework for reducing inflation.

However, the Chief Secretary failed to point out that the Government are responsible for putting inflation into double figures in the first place. As one of my colleagues asked, if the battle against inflation is so important for the Government, how come we have to win it twice?

Sir David Mitchell: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that, when the then Chancellor of the Exchequer was reducing interest rates and making credit easier, which caused the boom to which the hon. Gentleman refers and the inflation that followed, Labour and Liberal Front-Bench Members were calling for him to do even more? That would have stoked up an even higher rate of inflation and caused even worse problems.

Mr. Radice: I am about to refer to precisely that point. The hon. Gentleman has anticipated my next argument.

The right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) used to boast of bringing inflation down to zero, but that was before he and the present Prime Minister, who was then Chief Secretary, allowed the economy to become out of control during the 1987-88 boom. Everybody now agrees that that period was a disaster for the country. Some of us actually said so at the time. I do not want to quote myself, but I shall do so if the hon. Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) wishes.

With respect to the hon. Gentleman, it is not just the mistake of reducing interest rates too sharply in the wake of the October 1987 stock market crash, as the Prime Minister suggested at Question Time yesterday. Many other countries did precisely that, but they then put up interest rates. A much more important factor was the unprecedented explosion of credit and borrowing which followed financial deregulation.

If the hon. Gentleman doubts me, I pray in aid the right hon. Member for Blaby, who said precisely that about a month ago. He pointed out that that was the major cause of what happened. That explosion of credit had the effect of inflating the house market, and it led to a splurge of consumer spending. It was an important factor.

Most objective commentators would agree that another major error was the tax-cutting budget of 1988, which reduced taxes by £6 billion and gave all the wrong signals to the consumer when the economy was already out of control. The result of those crass policy errors was a badly overheated economy, which led to soaring inflation and a record balance of payments deficit.

The Government also fail to point out—we heard nothing about it from the Chief Secretary—the other side of the coin. They have managed to reduce inflation from its high point only because they have also created the longest recession since the 1930s, a recession which is still with us. I was amazed not to hear of that from the Chief Secretary. As we all know, GDP, excluding oil, has declined for six successive quarters since the second quarter of 1990. I hope that we hear less of the humbug about our recession being due to world recession. The Government know that that is nonsense, and they should stop pretending otherwise.

In March 1991, the Government, the Governor of the Bank of England and the Chancellor of the Exchequer admitted to the Treasury Select Committee that the British recession was home-grown. In answer to a question from me, the Governor of the Bank of England said:

> "The recession here is in response to what was undeniably an excessive growth in previous years and what might be called unilateral correction by us."

There was nothing about world recession.

The next day, even more significantly, the Chancellor, in answer to another question from me, said:

> "I do not think that there is a world recession. I think it is absolutely true that the main cause and origin of the recession is a response to the very fast growth which exceeded the underlying growth of capacity."

He did not blame a world recession; he said that it is a response to our getting the economy out of hand.

In short, our recession was not a response to world factors but was acknowledged, even by Ministers, to be "home-grown", a way of dealing with the inflation that they themselves had caused. It is clear what has happened to the British economy. To bring it back into balance, the Government put up interest rates to record levels. They relied entirely on interest rates because, for ideological reasons, they ruled out putting up direct taxes, as they were urged to do by many commentators.

Reliance exclusively on interest rates took a long time to work. It had malign side effects, particularly on the housing market and investment, and ultimately it plunged Britain into a very deep recession, with all that that means in lost output, redundancies, bankruptcies and rising unemployment.

The real question facing the House and the country is how we bring about a recovery without driving up inflation again. The Government spent more than a year saying that recovery was in sight—just around the corner. We were told that the economy would recover in a natural, cyclical way, as destocking ended and consumer confidence revived. Despite all the optimistic forecasts—many made to the House and to the Treasury Select Committee—and despite all the fine ministerial words, the recovery has simply not arrived. Indeed, Ministers have recently adopted a new formula. They say that the ingredients for recovery are now in place—whatever that means.

If we are to know what to do and if we are to have recovery without putting up inflation again, it is important to analyse what has gone wrong. We cannot blame the recent slowdown in the German and French economies for our own recession or for the slowness of our economy to recover. Indeed, our exports to the EC—we actually heard it from the Chief Secretary—have been one of the few success stories of the past year or so.

The key problem is the reluctance of the British consumer to spend, despite falling inflation and reduced interest rates. The Governor of the Bank of England is probably right to say that consumers

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"may be making attempts to reduce their existing debt holdings in much the same way that companies . . . have sought to reduce their borrowings."

In other words, consumers having taken on an excessive level of debt in the early 1980s—*[Interruption.]*—I wonder whether the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark), who is speaking from a sedentary position, might listen, because it is a point that he knows very well—are understandably reluctant to take on new commitments. My conclusion is that we cannot, indeed should not, rely solely on the consumer to bring about recovery.

The Government also have a role particularly in fiscal policy, as the Treasury Select Committee has pointed out. In that connection, it has been hilarious to observe the Government, in their dying days, suddenly rediscovering Keynesianism. One would think that the so-called monetarist revolution of the early 1980s, which the hon. Member for Selly Oak opposed, had never happened. I feel quite sorry for some of the devotees of the medium-term financial strategy who are still stranded on the Conservative Benches.

Whatever happened to controlling the money supply? What about reducing public spending or reducing the public sector borrowing requirement? What about balanced budgets? All the things we used to hear about in the 1980s are a thing of the past. We are told, "Don't worry about it." Now we are told that the Government have decided to increase borrowing to pay for tax cuts —"borrowing billions to bribe millions", as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has put it. That is deathbed Keynesianism with a vengeance. Indeed, it is living proof that, in Major's Tory party, electoral expediency always comes first.

I believe—here I agree with the hon. Member for Cornwall, South-East—that reducing the standard rate, as the Government apparently propose, is the least effective way of bringing Britain out of recession, and the most dangerous for inflation.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will my hon. Friend, with whom I sit on the Treasury Select Committee and for whom I have great regard, tell us how increasing taxation on those we need to gear up the recovery will help the economy, them or the future Labour Government for which he hopes?

Mr. Radice: Our top rate of taxation is the lowest in the European Community. I believe that it is sensible for those who are well off to pay a fair rate of tax. I do not believe that they are doing so at present. I do not see any evidence that reducing taxes on the very rich improves the supply side of the economy. All the evidence is that they tend to do less work.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: That is not an answer.

Mr. Radice: Well, it is an answer that satisfies me, even if it does not satisfy the hon. Gentleman.

Given the problem of personal debt—*[Interruption.]* I wonder whether I could hold the attention of the hon. Member for Selly Oak for a second—it will not necessarily be enough to encourage people to spend by reducing taxes. Judging from the continuing high figures for imports—despite the recession—even if they spend, much of the money which goes in tax cuts could leak away on foreign goods. Using up public resources on tax cuts means that there is less money for other anti-recession measures and for investment in education, training and research and development—all important items. Above all, the recovery would be insecurely based and inflation-prone. If the recovery was based on tax cuts, it would be a recipe for another round of the stop-go to which we have become so accustomed under the Conservative Government.

If part of the objective is to increase consumer spending, and so bring about a sustained recovery, it would be far more sensible, as well as more socially desirable, to increase child benefit and pensions, as the Labour party proposes. In that way we could at least be certain that a good proportion of the increase would go directly into consumption.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Where will the money come from?

Mr. Radice: The hon. Gentleman asks where the money will come from. That happens to apply also to the Government, who propose to reduce the standard rate of tax and pay for it by borrowing. We cannot have any lectures from the Conservative party about financial rectitude when it has amassed such an enormous public sector borrowing requirement. The hon. Gentleman's point cannot be a serious one.

As my right hon. Friends suggest and as the Confederation of British Industry recommends, we will also need to give assistance to industry through investment incentives and the acceleration of infrastructure projects. At the same time, we must make an immediate start on investing in education, training and research and development, thus improving the supply side of the economy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) said, we must look at both the demand and supply sides of the economy if we are to bring inflation under control.

If we are serious about reducing inflation and keeping it down, about creating a recovery and sustaining it and about looking beyond 9 April to seek a long-term future for the British economy, we will need a mixed set of objectives to emphasise not only control of inflation but sustaining growth, increasing investment and creating jobs. We will also need a mixed set of policy instruments. We cannot rely entirely on interest rates, as the Government have done.

Above all, we shall need a balance in the economy, which we have signally failed to achieve in the past five years. On their past record, we shall never obtain that from the Conservative Government. That is yet another reason why we need a Labour Government.

7.34 pm

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): I make no apology for taking a trip down memory lane, because there are many young people who will vote for the first time in the forthcoming election and I do not believe that they understand what the consequences of a Labour Government would be.

I agreed for once with the Leader of the Opposition when he admitted in one of his habitual gaffes that Labour did not have a clue how to tackle inflation. We certainly know that that is true. I am relieved to find that he and his party have finally come clean on the issue. Therefore, it is not surprising that he goes out of his way to avoid talking

about inflation. That probably comes as a huge relief to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith).

Anti-inflationary policy is a clear indicator of a party's fitness to govern. Sound money lies at the heart of a stable community. It determines whether a Government can produce the conditions for prosperity or must break their promises. That is why any debate on inflation will quickly spill over the narrow confines of economic theory. Its scope is far wider than that. Inflation is a scourge which harms senior citizens, mortgage payers, people on fixed incomes and especially those with savings. It undermines our ability to export and create long-term employment. Real jobs come from making things that people want to buy at the right price.

Unit costs are paramount. That is something that the Labour party clearly does not understand. Simply to ignore the problem reveals at best a total lack of comprehension of the real world and at worst a gross dereliction of duty. I can think of no greater single threat to the general well-being of the British people than hyper-inflation.

The Government understand the aspirations of working people and business. That is why in the past 12 years we have made the battle against inflation our highest priority. That is why we have more people in work than ever before and why we have more small businesses than ever before. We have proved that economic growth in the United Kingdom can be based only on low inflation. That is why the United Kingdom grew faster than Germany or France in the 1980s. In the previous two decades, we had the slowest growth of the major EC countries.

If inflation goes unchecked, the achievements of British industry are continually undermined. For example, it has been estimated that each additional percentage point of inflation costs business £5,000 million a year—an unacceptable overhead over which the Government have direct control. If inflation is rampant, the confidence of industry is undermined and uncertainty spreads. As companies look no further ahead than the short term, they fail to invest in new jobs and equipment. They begin to lose their competitive edge.

The Government have given firms the confidence to invest. Today, business investment is almost 60 per cent. higher than it was in 1981. Since 1979, it has grown faster in the United Kingdom than in France and Germany. Furthermore, interest rates rise with inflation. That reduces cash flow, particularly in small companies with a limited ability to borrow. Inevitably, people with mortgages are also hit.

Our membership of the exchange rate mechanism inevitably places constraints on the extent of interest rate cuts. We understand that. Nevertheless, since my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) took over as Prime Minister, interest rates have fallen by 5·5 percentage points. Such truths appear self evident to Conservatives. That is why we have been so single-minded in our quest for low inflation. Labour is likely to have more success in the quest for the holy grail. The used and damaged goods which it palms off as economic policy would light a bonfire of inflation, which would become the funeral pyre of the British economy. In the 1970s, Brazil and the United Kingdom once again had two things in common—Ronnie Biggs and hyper-inflation.

Labour claims that inflation can be curbed by introducing credit controls, and that they should be used rather than interest rates. Unfortunately, even after 12 years in opposition, they have not decided what form their credit controls would take. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) has pointed out that, since 85 per cent. of personal credit takes the form of mortgages, credit controls would have to cover mortgage borrowing if they were to have any impact on overall levels of activity in the economy.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East disagrees. He wants to inhibit the banks' capacity to lend. It is self-defeating for anyone searching for an alternative to interest rates to argue for direct controls on the quality of money in the banking system.

The Opposition's policy would result in higher interest rates. That has always been Labour's way—it has tried, and it has failed. It is hardly surprising that Labour clings ever more tightly to the exchange rate mechanism. Its recent conversion is the product of blind panic rather than fiscal prudence. It sees the ERM as an answer to all its problems. It is an escape route from tough economic decisions. Someone should be kind and tell those on the Labour Front Bench that the ERM means being willing to accept high interest rates and limits on spending and borrowing—the two things that Labour Members and socialists have closest to their hearts.

Why are the Opposition shy about telling us what they would do if they were in government? If they are not going to devalue, interest rates would have to go up. We all know that that would happen under Labour. Why are Labour Members so shy about it? Why do they not come clean?

Aside from those examples of Labour's kamikaze approach to economics, I am concerned about their taxation rates. It is obvious, even to the most left-wing commentator, that, to meet its multitude of spending policies, Labour would have to increase taxes. The Oppositon have tried to hide that, just as the benevolent drunk buys a few drinks, but their multitude of policy documents remain full of expensive promises for every interest group under the sun.

Labour may no longer be a party of principle, but it is a party of priorities—literally dozens of them, £35 billion of them. The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) has said that education is the first priority. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) has said that the United Nations aid target is a top priority. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) tells us that bridging the skills gap will be a priority. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East thinks that growth in investment is the key priority. Labour politicians are reeling off the goodies like over-zealous games show hosts—£35 billion, £36 billion, and so the list goes on.

Treasury Ministers have rightly calculated that Labour's promises amount to an extra £35 billion in public expenditure. Everyone knows that that extra spending will be financed through higher direct taxation—through £20 a week in direct taxation on everyone earning more than £20,000 a year. Do Opposition Members think that 180,000 teachers earn too much? If they do not, why are they going to take another £20 in tax off them?

The Government are in a position to borrow because we have had the prudence to pay back £27 billion of borrowing since 1979. While our public sector borrowing requirement is 1·75 per cent. of GDP, Labour's reached a peak of 9·5 per cent. in 1975-76. It was robbing Peter to pay Paul.

[Mr. David Evans]

I want my children to hear about the experiences of the 1970s, which show what happens when taxes increase, as they inevitably do under a Labour Government. I recall visiting a supermarket with my wife in the mid-1970s, looking for some Branston pickle. We could not find it because the front of the jar was taken up with price increases which had been stuck on. When we found it, my wife said, "Don't buy the first one, look at the back, because you'll find one cheaper."

Mr. Burt: Since my hon. Friend is taking a trip down memory lane, does he recall the days when there was an overwhelming smell of methylated spirits in supermarkets because the shop assistants were taking off last week's prices and putting on this week's? Does he not fear that that time will return?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is right, although in my case they were not taking the prices off with methylated spirits but just sticking them over the old ones. One could not tell what the product was because so many price increases had been stuck on. If one shopped around for a while, one could cut a lot from the grocery bill by taking products from the back because the bloke had not had time to stick the new price on.

When employers grant wage increases that they cannot afford, they pass them on in higher prices; hence the Branston pickle. The result is a wage-price spiral that benefits no one, except ferry companies and airlines as people scurry to other countries where they can earn a living and not pay ridiculous rates of tax. Add to that Labour's plan for a national minimum wage. Can one believe it? Think of all the youngsters and women with families who want to work. Labour will do away with that, and the price of goods and unit costs will go up. Labour has no consideration for the nation, or for the millions of people who like going to work and like having a part-time job. It is total nonsense.

The Minister said last week that that might cost 100,000 jobs. I think that he has got it wrong and that the figure will be nearer 2 million.

Mr. Radice: Or 20 million?

Mr. Evans: Two million will do.

A socialist Government would hurt the very people it claimed to protect. The worst cruelty of the 1970s was that high inflation robbed pensioners of their lifetime savings. During the nightmare of the late 1970s, there was a 30 per cent. reduction in the value of their savings. It was not until the 1980s that they started to see a decent return on the money that they had spent a lifetime scraping together. I am sick and tired of the Opposition and of the bleeding heart tendency, who try to claim that the moral high ground belongs to them, while advocating policies which would hurt the people that they claim to respect—the unskilled and the low-waged.

When Labour Members were in government, they even resorted three times in five years to taking away the £10 Christmas bonus, yet they tell us that they will look after pensioners. They are going to give pensioners £5 or £8, but inflation will be ripping away at 27 per cent. They took Christmas pudding off the pensioners.

We have created conditions for lasting national prosperity. Since 1979, the average inflation rate has been 7·6 per cent., less than half Labour's comparable figure of 15·5 per cent. Our best figure has been 2·4 per cent.—Labour can only dream about that. The only time that the Labour Government invested in a space programme was when inflation went into orbit.

In August 1975, our inflation rate made us the sick joke of Europe. When I am at home, my children ask me, "Come on; what was Labour's highest inflation rate?" I say, "Have a guess." They say, "10 per cent." I say no. They ask, "11 per cent?" I say, "Sorry." They say, "12 per cent." [HON. MEMBERS: "Higher."] They say, "13 per cent." [HON. MEMBERS: "Higher."] They say, "It can't have been 14 per cent." [HON. MEMBERS: "Higher."] "15?" [HON. MEMBERS: "More."] "16?" [HON. MEMBERS: More."] They say, "Oh come on, dad; you've got to be joking. Was it 17?" (HON. MEMBERS: "More."] "18?" They say, "Make a cup of tea, mum, this is getting silly." When they get up to 20 per cent., they say, "Oh, it can't be true. This must be a joke you're telling us. 21 per cent? 22 per cent? 23? 24? 25? 26? 27? That's unbelievable." The truth is that it is a joke. Here we are now with an inflation rate of 4·1, and the Opposition are still not satisfied.

The current rate of inflation would have had Jim Callaghan and Denis Healey dancing above No. 10. Those two fiddlers on the roof staked their faith and reputation on the social contract, which, because of inflation and greed, was a disaster for this country. Who will ever forget Customs and Excise, railway men, tanker drivers, rubbish collectors and grave diggers going on strike because of greed and because inflation had overtaken them? They had to strike for more money. The National Union of Public Employees and the Confederation of Health Service Employees got the support services on strike. It was a nightmare: everybody was being blackmailed by the unions, the TGWU lot, with their beer and sandwiches in No. 10 at 11 o'clock every morning, when the chant was, "We want more, we want more."

The Chancellor left for Heathrow in his Jaguar, and on his way he found that the IMF, the official receiver, had arrived. It had come to run our country and to tell us whether we would be able to pay for this or that. The Government totally relinquished their responsibility and the IMF was in Downing street telling them how to run the country and look after our people. That is what happened when that lot were in power. The Chancellor finally told us why the IMF was here.

Our policies are tried and tested—and, just as important, we have had the courage to stick to them. In 1981, 364 economists told us that the recession would never end if we continued our policy of reducing inflation but we stuck to our guns and proved them wrong. In 1985, the raising of interest rates to 14 per cent. was highly unpopular, but we faced the unpopularity and inflation came down again. We have the stomach to take unpalatable decisions which will ultimately benefit the country, and we shall continue to do so.

Labour has seen the basis of its economic policy laughed out of every country in eastern Europe. To Labour, a credible economic policy means keeping the IMF out of the Treasury. That would be its sole ambition, so that the IMF was not telling a Labour Government what to do. What better example of that could there be than the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) being dragged back from Heathrow? Bookmakers say that they would rather offer odds on the prospect of night following day than on the likelihood of inflation going

down under a Labour Government. That is what is known as a racing certainty, and it is also a racing certainty that that lot will not get back into power.

7.54 pm

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): I shall continue the stroll down memory lane which was started by the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans). I recall the winter of discontent in 1978 and I remember my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), who at that time was Leader of the House and the Member for Ebbw Vale, coming to the by-election at Pontefract and Castleford. We told him that 1 million people were unemployed and that the trade deficit was £500 million. We said that the average interest rate that year was 10·7 per cent., taxes were averaging 34·75 per cent. of people's wages and that 3,000 houses a year were being repossessed. We told him that those things were unacceptable and that we could not stomach them.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent is very wise and he said, "I agree, it is indeed bad. But if the other lot get in, it will be even worse." I did not believe him and I have suffered for that. The figures show that there are now 2·5 million unemployed people—1·5 million more than during the winter of discontent. The current trade deficit is £5·6 billion, 11 times what it was when Labour was in power. The average interest rate is 12·4 per cent., 2 per cent. up, and taxes average 37 per cent. of people's wages, almost 3 per cent. up. Worst of all, there have been 75,000 house repossessions. That means that 75,000 families are paying for the Government's ham-fisted attempt to deal with inflation.

Part of my constituency covers Wentbridge and cognoscenti on the Government side will realise that Wentbridge was the home of Anthony Barber. We all know about baby booms and we remember Barber booms. We recall what he did to the economy and what a Labour Government had to do to remedy that. We had to struggle when the price of oil quadrupled, but no Conservative Member has mentioned that. That price increase caused enormous difficulties, but in spite of them we were able to stay below the average rate of inflation in the European Community. That cannot be said of the past five years. Inflation in Britain has increased more than in any Community country. That is appalling.

Sir Gerrard Neale: Can the hon. Gentleman explain why, for the first time since the war, the United Kingdom has lower inflation than Germany and the lowest rate for many years?

Mr. Enright: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman gets his figures, but they are totally wrong. I shall give him some accurate figures on what the pound was worth in 1979 and what it is worth now. Conservative Members have spoken about printing money. In 1979 the pound was worth $2·12, but it is now worth $1·75—an 18 per cent. drop. In 1979 the pound was worth 465·57 yen, but it is now worth 225·5 yen—57 per cent. down. In 1979 the rate for the pound was DM 3·89, but it is now DM 2·88—a 26 per cent. drop. I do not wish to be unfair and admit that our economy has done rather better than some others, especially in terms of currency. Greece and Portugal are two countries that have done worse, and we could certainly look at countries on the west coast of Africa. I congratulate the Government on managing to keep ahead of those economies. It is a pretty poor state when we have to boast of how well we do——

Mr. Radice: Does not what my hon. Friend has said give the lie to the Conservative party, which accuses us of always devaluing the pound? Since 1979, it is the Conservative Government who have considerably devalued the pound.

Mr. Enright: My hon. Friend makes the point with great clarity. The problem for the Government, which is shared by the Liberal Democrats, is that they take a one-dimensional view of the economy. There are no hues or shades; there is no four-sided consideration. The Government come up with one solution at a time. They cannot think laterally—they think in tidy lines.

I shall cite a good example of how the planning and the policy of the Government inevitably lead to inflation—inflation not just this year, but increases being stoked up for 20 years ahead. The Government take an accountant's view, year in and year out. They say, "Is there a little bit of profit this year? Jolly good, let's see if we can get one next year." They do not plan for five or 10 years ahead.

That lack of planning is clearest in the Government's energy policy. There used to be 12 pits in my constituency. I accept that a couple of them had to close because they were worked out—there is no argument about that—but other pits have 30 years' coal reserves. For reasons that I cannot understand, those pits are being closed. Perhaps it is ideology; perhaps it is an inability to think things through. We are gradually being left at the mercy of foreign fuels. We are not looking to the next century—yet, by then, coal will once again have overtaken all other forms of fuel as the principal factor in the production of the energy that we need. There has been no thought of that.

The Government say that they have spent lots and lots of money on the coal industry, and they have. I grant them that. However, that money has been spent not on keeping pits alive, not on clean coal technology and not on getting together with our European friends, but on closing pits and paying off men to get them out of work. We should think of the heedlessness of the Government's attitude towards those who have been made redundant, all in the so-called cause of bringing down inflation.

It does not matter whether those people used to work for the electricity boards or in the pits. Those people are, perhaps 50 and they have their pay-off of £40,000. That is not a lot of money on which to live; it will not do them a great deal of good. They get that money and they think that it will be a bit of a nest egg. They can get out of what is perhaps not a very good environment and they hope to start earning again—but no, they are not allowed on the Government's training schemes. Quite frankly, on some occasions I tell them that they are lucky not to be allowed on them. I can give an example from my constituency about those schemes. A gentleman who came to see me last weekend said, "I went on the training scheme and I was promised that I could train for a heavy goods vehicle licence, but I have now been with the firm for three months and I have spent that entire time delivering packages here, there and everywhere, in a little van on my own." The Government's training schemes are just cheap labour and the Government are subsidising that in different areas. It is appalling.

[Mr. Enright]

I prefer to call the minimum wage the just wage. When I was brought up in the Young Christian Workers, we talked about the need for a just wage. We talked unashamedly about the state having a part to play in a just wage—just as all the Christian Democrats on the continent believe. They are happy to accept a just wage. I would accept that challenge, too. Conservative Members know that if they visit a car factory in Germany on a Friday, the workers are not eking out the work to get overtime to help to pay the rent or to pay for a holiday. They say, "We are earning sufficient now. We are proud of our products and we are going to get on with producing them. We want to have as much free time as possible." They get the job done. That is what happens in a high-wage economy.

If we insist on having a low-wage economy, we will have low-value jobs and skills will be wiped out. That has happened. We who have relied upon the textile industry to provide jobs know that only too well. The multi-fibre arrangement was meant to be a form of work swapping. It was intended that people in the industry should move out of it and into high-tech industry so that poorer parts of the world could then develop their textile industries. What happened? Jobs were lost, but there was no positive planning by the Government to bring in new technology.

We know what the Government's policies are all about —they do not put them together. We cannot look at just one thing at one time; we have to deal with education, training, the health service and industry and develop them together. How to get the balance right depends on what is found in the books—and, quite frankly, I am terrified of what we will find in the books.

I want to say a word about the exchange rate mechanism. Both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats are rather taken with the ERM. I am sorry to attack the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) in his absence, but he made certain comments about the ERM. I understand why he has had to return to his constituency; I am sure that my very good friend Gordon Adam will beat him at the next general election.

The ERM does not depend merely on interest rates. Nor, because we are in the ERM, are we so susceptible to the old so-called run on the pound. Conservative Members are living in the old days. The very fact that the new Labour Government will be in the ERM with a commitment, together with the rest of Europe, to bring in the social charter will bring the support that we need from the other members of the European Community. Our determination to do that, which was confirmed to me just a fortnight ago, already impresses people, not from the European Parliament, but from the other member Governments. I am proud of that.

When the Chief Secretary was talking about pretty polly parrots, he reminded me of the Greek story about Echo. She was a nymph who went to Hera, her mother —*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. It is a historical story.

Mr. Enright: Echo went to her mother and told beautiful tales that entranced her. While she was telling the tales, naughty things were going on. Echo did not realise what was happening, and she kept on telling the beautiful tales and the naughty things kept happening. Hera said, "I will punish you so that everything you say is mere repetition of the last thing said." I was reminded of that because the Chancellor of the Exchequer is very like that. If the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) said, "Poll tax, poll tax", he said, "Poll tax, poll tax"—and then it went down to the Chief Secretary. Every little twist and turn in policy has been followed slavishly. Echo met her end when she encountered Narcissus—who fell in love with his reflection, jumped in the water and drowned. That is what will happen to the Government—and the sooner the better.

8.9 pm

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): I enjoyed the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans). He causes amusement among Opposition Members, but that is prompted more by worry than anything else. They know that my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield has his finger on the pulse.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): He is the voice of Britain.

Mr. Burt: Just as my hon. Friend says. When my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield expresses in such clear terms his fears of how Labour would run the country, he knows that many are listening. The appropriate classical analogy is not with Hera but with Prometheus, who was chained to the rock, and every day had part of his liver torn out. That is what would happen to Britain if Labour took office.

I enjoyed the contribution of the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright), but I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) is not in his place, for I enjoyed his speech also. He spoke of the knockabout nature of the speech made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary. One always knows when Labour Members are worried, because they refer to "knockabout". Last week, they referred to the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment in those terms, but we all know how much damage it did them. It was a good speech.

Today, my right hon. and learned Friend did not make a knockabout speech but exposed the large gaps in Labour's policies for dealing with inflation. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said that he did not expect to discover in today's debate further question marks over Labour's inflation policies, but did so.

The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent went wrong when he referred to the prostitution of this Parliament. That was over the top. The right hon. Gentleman saw his party, Government, and country bend over backwards to allow the trade union movement to take over. That was real prostitution, and the right hon. Gentleman should always remember that.

History teaches us much about the ravages of inflation on not only a country's internal economic development but relationships between nations as a consequence of economic decline and expansionism—with the aggressive nationalism that that often produces—but it is remarkable how little history has taught the British Labour party. Little attention is paid in its calculations to the effect of inflation on the future.

We can all be forgiven for imagining that inflation matters very little to Labour. It appears from today's

performance by Labour Front Benchers that they do not appreciate the importance of inflation, which is why they have no policies for dealing with it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield said, that alone should disqualify Labour from ever holding office.

Inflation is arguably the biggest single threat to any economy. It devalues currency over a long period, thus affecting the competitiveness of nationally-based industries, as well as the savings of all—and especially of those on fixed incomes. Investment and savings are the key to this country's recovery from the present worldwide recession. Increasing competitiveness in industry has already been made possible by the Government over the past decade. Higher manufacturing productivity proves that, as does Britain's share of world trade in manufactures, which has increased for the third year in succession.

That performance is likely to improve only in a low tax, low interest rate, and low inflation economy. The raw material for capital investment in industry comes not from Government, as the Opposition so often suggest, but from savings—which are often derided by Labour as unearned income. Try telling those of our constituents who have worked hard all their lives to put a little money away that that is unearned income.

Labour makes no secret of its high taxation policies, regardless of the growing number of economic advisers who support the Government's contention that the way out of the present recession is to encourage lower taxation as a stimulus for industry and higher personal consumption. Labour's taxes on savings would damage the crucial raw material needed for industrial recovery. It is as if Labour was stuck in a time warp—in the 1960s and 1970s—when the world was a different place, and socialism was alive—if not particularly well—and stalking the world with its flawed economic analyses. The world has moved on, but Labour has not—and it persists in following policies that would fuel inflation and exacerbate recession.

Raised public sector expectations were the downfall of the last Labour Government, in the winter of discontent—and Labour is starting that whole process over again. One remembers training levies, interference in business, and higher interest rates. This afternoon, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary described, analyst by analyst, the expected scenario of higher interest rates under Labour. He quoted the Confederation of British Industry's assertion that every percentage point increase in inflation rates adds another £5 billion to industry's costs.

A survey by *The Financial Weekly* found that 87 per cent. of fund managers believe that the Conservatives are better at controlling inflation and that only 3 per cent. backed Labour. In another survey, *The Independent on Sunday* found that only 5 per cent. of top business executives trust Labour to control inflation, while 91 per cent. distrust Labour's anti-inflation credentials. Those are the very people whom Labour expect to be in the forefront of recovery should it form a Government—but they have no confidence in Labour. Some recovery that would be.

In debating inflation on a larger scale, sometimes we forget to relate it to our constituents. Labour talks incessantly of the need to put money into public services, but appears to have forgotten the connection between that and the need to control inflation. My constituents have not. During the 1974-79 Labour Government, as inflation went through the roof and the country moved towards bankruptcy and the International Monetary Fund, the Government had great plans for my constituency, as for many others. The effect of the catastrophic situation that Labour Government brought upon themselves turned those dreams to nightmares.

We saw first restrictions on local government finance. I quote from a 1975 circular entitled "Local authority expenditure: Financial Planning 1976-77". It required local government expenditure to go on standstill for the following year. Bearing in mind the rate of inflation then, standstill meant real reductions in expenditure. Paragraph 7 of that document stated:

"But there will inevitably be a reduction in the standard of local services."

Paragraph 12 added:

"Those local authorities that have already allowed children to be admitted full time to infant classes on reaching the age of 4 should review this policy in the interests of economy. Rising 5s should not be admitted unless they make no additional call on educational resources."

So much for Labour's current plans on nursery education for all. Labour promises, but it cannot deliver. That was the reality when Labour was last in government, and it would be the reality next time.

If that were not bad enough, I will describe the effect of the last Labour Government on Bury's health services. For the first time since the inception of the NHS in 1948, expenditure fell in my constituency between 1974 and 1979, by 2 per cent. The effect on services can be imagined. Capital expenditure plans were reduced, and the general hospital for which my constituents had long waited had to wait for a Conservative Government before it was built.

That is what inflation means in practice. If one lets the economy run into the sand, one cannot do what one has promised. Local authority and health services were badly neglected in my constituency. Labour cannot deliver the caring services that it is always talking about.

If the control and conquest of inflation in the past has had an effect on my constituency, I hope that, once we are through the present recession, firm control of the economy will have a beneficial future effect for not only my constituency but for the development of Conservative thought and policy as we head towards the year 2000.

In the past, I have made no secret of my concern about the fact that, from time to time, the Conservative party in government has become over-identified with an economic rigidity that extends far beyond its normal remit. The market philosophy, while of enormous benefit in its own sphere, can be inappropriate when applied to other aspects of life. I have always believed that economics is a good friend of Governments, but not always the best master.

Unlike the Labour party, the present Conservative Government have always understood that conquering inflation gives the firmest base to the economy. Only firm control of the economy gives a Government the opportunity to put into practice the other policies—the social policies—that are a necessary adjunct of any modern Government. In a sense, traditional Conservativism has seen off its greatest enemy: an outdated and fatally flawed socialist theory of both society and the economy. At the hour of its greatest triumph, however, it is important that modern Conservatism is not sabotaged by a laissez-faire market capitalistic model that would threaten to undermine the social consensus that has grown up in the United Kingdom.

In my view, that social consensus has much in common with the German social market philosophy. It recognises

[Mr. Burt]

the essentially free-market nature of capitalism, but it also recognises its limits, and its need to be controlled from time to time. If socialism is finally to be defeated, we must ensure that everyone in the country has a stake in what modern free-market economics can produce for the country as a whole.

That means that the next Conservative Government, as well as committing themselves resolutely to the firm control of inflation and the management of the economy, must ensure that they continue to strive for solutions to the major social problems of our time. They must be determined to make the reduction of unemployment a priority. They must be determined to break down further the apathy and inertia that can often blight the lives of many people on our public housing estates. They must continue the initiatives that are being launched by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment in relation to inner cities. They must continue, and intensify, their work in relation to the homeless, and must redouble their efforts to ensure that no one is left out of modern society because of lack of opportunity to improve educational skills, before and after leaving school.

The next Conservative Government must also continue to ensure that modern industrial society looks at the pollution caused by the processes of the 19th century with a 20th-century eye, so that growth and production are not incompatible with a high quality of life.

Many factors are needed to combat the social problems that affect not only this country, but many countries in modern society. One is the absolute determination and commitment of the Government of the day—and I am convinced that a Government led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) will possess that determination. A second is the economic means to combat the problems—an economic base that can be achieved only through the firm control of inflation. I am convinced that only a Government led by my right hon. Friend can do that.

Labour's lack of consideration and understanding of those issues has damaged my constituents and the country in the past. We must ensure that it does not have the chance to do the same again.

8.22 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) referred to the "prostitution" allegation made, quite fairly, by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot). I congratulate the hon. Gentleman. On the last occasion when we spoke together in a debate, he took a courageous step by not supporting his party—the Government—and taking a stand on its atrocious decision not to back the timely, if overdue, attempt to ban the sale of tobacco products in Europe. The hon. Gentleman said no to that, and the decision fell in Committee.

If we are to discuss who is prostituted in the House, perhaps we should examine the difference between the two sides. Unlike many other Opposition Members, I am not supported or sponsored by a trade union, a commercial organisation or any other body. Unfortunately for Conservative Members, I believe that the Government's craven decision—which has since been reinforced—not to back the attempt to reduce the amount of smoking among young people, when we know that the tobacco firms are deliberately concentrating their £100 million advertising campaign on the young, is largely due to the fact that Conservative Members have prostituted their position in the House.

The figures are telling. Although Conservative Members repeatedly speak of Labour Members' being in hock to the unions, the truth is very different. Only 17 Opposition Members are paid advisers to trade unions, and even if we include all the others with paid involvement, the total is only 14 per cent. As for Conservative Members, 85 per cent.——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying very far from the motion.

Mr. Flynn: I shall come back to the motion, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I think that the matter needs——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will come back to it immediately, because he is very far from it.

Mr. Flynn: This preposterous motion asks us to congratulate the Government on the terrible state in which we now find ourselves. The speech with which the Chief Secretary opened the debate began with a joke about a parrot and ended with a joke about a haggis; there was very little in between. In their pre-election tension—hysteria, even—the Government seem to feel that the answer to all their problems is to put on cheap vaudeville acts at the Dispatch Box: we were given another of those last week.

The Government have begun to believe their own mythology. The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) talked, quite erroneously, about the difference between the interest rate in this country and that in Germany. What we have now is not the best interest rate in Europe, or among similar countries; we have just about got down to the average—but at what an enormous cost, in bankruptcies, soaring unemployment and the collapse of the housing market.

Only today, we have learnt from an authoritative organisation that 2·5 million households are struggling with debt. According to its report, many people suspected that that was so, but only now is the seriousness of the position recognised. At least one of the main determinants has been the Government's decision about the social fund, which meant that those in desperate need were given loans —or, if they could not repay such loans, received nothing. All those families have become caught up in a cycle of debt that overshadows their whole lives. Instead of living life to the full, they find that their every action and decision is determined by their debt level.

A new and vulnerable group of debtors created entirely as a result of the Government's policy are the 15,000 pensioners who have taken on home income bonds. One of the principal brokers of such bonds was the West Bromwich building society. They were sold in the atmosphere of euphoria that followed the 1988 Budget, when the banks were infected with the general mood of optimism. I believe that many of the bonds are fraudulent.

A typical example is a lady in my constituency. Her home was worth £47,000, and she took out a bond that was described to her as a high-interest bond. What she was not told was that it was a high-risk bond, and that the sum was on loan. That happened only two years ago. The lady

was in her early 60s when she took out the bond. If the debt continues until the year 2015, she will owe the building society £1·5 million. I believe that that is a fraud. Two years into the bond, that lady now finds that the value of her property has fallen from £47,000 to £40,000, and that her debt has increased to £35,000.

People who have been prudent all their lives, and have bought their own homes, have been offered such deals and have suddenly been faced with the dreadful prospect of homelessness and all that goes with it—for their local councils have no houses to put them in. The Government were responsible for the sudden boom in house prices. Their policies were responsible for the following loss in confidence. Conservatives have repeated their parrot cry tonight—it amounts to a mantra—that a Labour Government would lead to high taxation. It is one of the many myths that they put about. *[Interruption.]* Let me remind the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame. E. Kellett-Bowman) who is making noises over there and who I am sure will be happy to intervene——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I merely said that I do not think that people should risk it.

Mr. Flynn: Perhaps they should not have risked a Tory Government. It is because of what has happened under the Conservative Government—I shall be happy to give way to the hon. Lady if she can deny it—that we have the highest taxes that we have ever experienced.

The arithmetic stares us in the face. In 1979, total tax under Labour amounted to 34·25 per cent. It has now risen to 37 per cent. The Conservative party is the party of high taxes. What the Government have done, however, is to shift tax from the more visible area—income tax—and put it on to value added tax and national insurance, where the burden is less obvious. People are therefore less aware of the tax burden that has been imposed on them.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman does not refer to what the Government did as a result of their tax policy. When we reduced the 98 per cent. tax rate that had prevailed under Labour, we encouraged energetic people to return to this country from abroad. Therefore, we increased the tax yield from a much lower rate of tax. If the Labour party were to get in, people would immediately flee this country and a lot of effort would be put into evading tax instead of into productive employment. We have levied tax from a vastly increased number of high earners. That has led to more money being put into the national health service, education and pensions. That is what we have done with the increased tax yield from high earners.

Mr. Flynn: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, but that is a different point. The Conservative party is the party of high taxes. They have increased national insurance from 6·5 per cent. to 9 per cent. and they have increased VAT from 8 per cent. under Labour to 17·5 per cent. Those are penal tax increases.

In a few weeks' time, the Labour Government will introduce fair national insurance rates. If a person is on an average wage of £13,000 to £15,000, he or she pays 9 per cent. in national insurance. If somebody is earning £76,000 —I understand that that is the Prime Minister's salary—he or she pays 3 per cent. If somebody is earning a salary equivalent to that of the editor of the *Daily Express*, which I understand is about £200,000, he or she pays less than 1 per cent. It is inequitable that the national insurance burden should fall most heavily on those on average or just below average wages. The next Labour Government will ensure that that tax burden is shared fairly and more evenly.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Has the hon. Gentleman taken into account the fact that the recent pay settlement for teachers means that 150,000 teachers will have to pay an additional 9 per cent. in national insurance contributions? Is that not most inequitable? It will lead to a great many people deciding not to enter the teaching profession. Nurses, hospital workers and policemen will also be caught by the additional 9 per cent. national insurance contribution which forms part of the Labour party's policy. It is the only part of their policy of which we are absolutely certain.

Mr. Flynn: Once again, the hon. Lady repeats the mythology that is printed in the tabloid press. That is the tabloid version of what the Labour party will do. As for what has been referred to as tax on unearned income of £30,000, again there will be a levelling up. The tax system is unfair and inequitable. Does the hon. Lady believe that we should maintain a system that places the highest tax burden on the lowest earners? I am sure that she does not believe that we should.

Reference has been made to business failures. One of the saddest sights during the recession has been the number of companies going into liquidation. Inflation, the obvious reason, is not the main cause of companies going into liquidation. It is indefensible that the Government have failed to control the main cause of business failures in my constituency and many other parts of the country. I refer to the insolvency laws and the Government's failure to control those parasites in business who make a habit of going into liquidation.

I give as an example a company owned by Mr. Brian Walker in my constituency. Nine of his companies went into liquidation. Six of his factories caught fire. That gentleman has built up debts amounting to more than £1 million, but he would say that he has no debts at all: that only those companies had debts. As the debts are corporate, not personal, debts he can carry on and not be declared insolvent or be disqualified from carrying on a business. What both he and many other people do is form a company and run up huge liabilities. They then unload the assets of those companies into a lifeboat company, after which those companies are put into receivership. They then leave their debts behind them.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have to call the hon. Gentleman to order once again and remind him that he ought to look at the substantive motion and the amendment. I am not hearing very much about inflation from him at the moment. Perhaps he will come back to that.

Mr. Flynn: The subject of bankruptcies has been raised during the debate and——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It may well have been raised, but not while I have been in the Chair. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is not challenging my ruling on this matter.

Mr. Flynn: I would not dream of doing such a thing, but I am afraid that we have been the victim of the average chairmanship throughout most of the debate and I now realise that——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I insist that the hon. Gentleman should now keep his remarks either to the amendment or to the substantive motion.

Mr. Flynn: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The arguments about the rate of inflation advanced by those who sit on the Treasury Bench show a certain loss of memory. The speech of the hon. Member for Welwyn, Hatfield (Mr. Evans) was laced with stories gleaned, it appears, from Christmas crackers, which led to hysterical laughter from his hon. Friends. He did a pantomime turn on interest rates and the levels of inflation. It is right to point out to Conservative Members that there was a time, painful though it may be for them to remember it, when inflation rose to 22 per cent. under this Government. That was in May 1980. I see that the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) is looking at me in astonishment. That was no joke. The rate of inflation was stoked up by the Government. Contrary to the promises that the Conservative party made in its election literature not to increase VAT, as soon as it got into power, it stoked up inflation by 4 percentage points.

The second boom, which led to another bust, was stoked up in 1988 by the totally irresponsible Budget of the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), the previous Chancellor. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury said that he wanted credit for all that the Government have done. Perhaps in the reply to the debate the Government will tell us how much credit they claim for the position that we are in.

I gave them a model to work on. It was from a man greatly revered in the House by those on the Government Front Bench when they were all "Yes ma'am, no ma'am" Ministers and Sir Alan Walters was an adviser to the previous Prime Minister. His assessment was that the world recession was 30 per cent. to blame, as one would accept. It is more difficult for Britain to get out of recession because of the position in the rest of the world. No reasonable person would pretend that that was not the case. Sir Alan Walters said that the Government were mainly responsible for the recession. He apportioned the responsibility at 70 per cent. to the Government's mismanagement of the economy and 30 per cent. to the world recession.

I do not know whether those on the Treasury Bench wish to be more ambitious and claim even more credit for it, but it would be nice to know how they apportion blame in the argument about black and white—world recession and British recession. I know of no commentator who does not agree that the Government's policies are responsible. The hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) once criticised the right hon. Member for Blaby as the man who had got us into this mess. That was recorded in an early-day motion. If it is understood that the problems are the result of the actions and the unfortunate Budget of the right hon. Member for Blaby, why on earth do not Conservative Members recognise that?

We are told that unemployment is a price worth paying. That is nonsense. Even in the Government's fiddled figures there is enormous unemployment. For example, one lady works as a cleaner in the Palace of Westminster in the early morning, at St. Thomas's hospital in the afternoon and occasionally in the evening in a hotel bar. She is one person receiving three low wages. According to Government figures, she is three people, because they count her three times in the employment figures. Again, the hon. Member for Canterbury looks astonished, but that is right. That is part of the mythology of the Government's figures. We have heard in the debate that there are more people in work than ever before. That is nonsense. There are more people in the job count, because many people are counted several times.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent made a telling speech. I shall end by reminding the House of what he said, because it was apposite. He quoted the words of Pope. We will be meeting in the House in a few months' time with many absentees from the Government Benches. My right hon. Friend said that we might well feel that the spirits glide here

"And haunt the places where their honour died."

The motion is one without honour.

8.43 pm

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): I wish to address the important subject of inflation from the historical perspective, its current relevance and in the context of the family and employment in York.

In the historical context, under the last Labour Government the average rate of inflation was 15·5 per cent. Sadly, as I think all economists, even socialist ones, would admit, inflation rose in 1975 to a peak of 26·9 per cent. I trust that that will go down in the history books and that we shall not see it happen again, even as a footnote. It was a real warning to the country.

The underlying rate of inflation in December was the lowest since 1969. Only a month ago, in January, the inflation rate was 4·1 per cent. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary said earlier, that is below the average for the European Community and for the OECD. Those welcome figures have been achieved against opposition by the Labour party and by the Liberals throughout. Every anti-inflationary measure taken by the Government has been opposed.

Inflation is not a significant part of current socialist philosophy. I followed with interest the party conference of the socialists in 1991. In the major speeches made on that occasion by the Leader of the Opposition, I could find no reference to inflation. That shows the interest of the socialists in inflation.

Rather than talk in the abstract, I should like to deal with how inflation affects one part of the economy. In that context, I shall take my constituency of York. Low inflation benefits the elderly, who were the subject of my maiden speech. The savings of the elderly now count for something, but they were eroded in times of high inflation. Those on fixed incomes, often forgotten by political parties, now find that their incomes count for something.

Mortgage payers, about whom we are concerned constantly, are purchasing their homes but there was a period of hyper-inflation—at over 26 per cent. under Labour—when it made no sense for people to take on that long-term commitment for 20 or 25 years. The Government, who have stood firm on the right of tenants to buy council accommodation, know that it makes sense for people to be able to develop that nest-egg and pass it on to future generations.

As regards exporters and their employees, the only opportunity for big international exporters such as Nestlé, Rowntree, Terry, and British Rail Engineering Ltd. to develop a sound national base is to look further afield for markets, not just in Europe but worldwide. Those markets will be eroded if we have hyper-inflation at home. If we have low inflation, companies will not have to increase prices three or four times a year, with the consequent high prices that have bedevilled us.

Employment has not been explored adequately in the debate. One praiseworthy aspect of low inflation is the numbers who have moved into employment. Since the last election, unemployment in York has been reduced by 24 per cent.

The fastest growth area of the economy, not only nationally but in York, is tourism. Because people have more money in their pockets as a result of low inflation, that disposable income can be spent on tourism.

Finally, employment in York has benefited from construction. When there is low inflation, it is worth while for companies to extend their properties, as has happened with General Accident, whose premises are close to the River Ouse. Because the company has additional responsibilities and has taken on additional employees, it has had to extend its building.

I contrast that good record with what would happen under Labour. Higher inflation is a concomitant of socialism and would come about through the artificial minimum wage. A number of economists have said—I believe that they are accurate—that it would raise prices by 3·5 per cent. over three years. Higher inflation would also be caused by the social charter. That is Euro-speak and Euro-engineering. The training levy proposed by the Labour party would add significantly to inflation. Higher state borrowing would require private companies such as those I have mentioned as well as those in the state sector to increase inflation. Higher interest rates would result.

I must draw to the House's attention the unrealistic hopes of the public sector. The Association of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen and the union that used to be known as the National Union of Railwaymen, both of which are well represented on the Opposition Benches, have expectations way beyond the level that could be paid for by British Rail or by the users of British Rail. Those artificial expectations would be raised under a socialist Government.

Also, the red tape, especially in employment matters, caused by the Opposition's proposals would strangle business and would increase costs. The black economy would also be encouraged. People would think that there was little point paying one's full taxes if there was high inflation. The black economy would rise to monumental proportions.

I shall try to be as charitable as I can, but the socialists believe that there should be a wider public sector, and that through that there would be a larger economy. In fact, it would simply mean that costs would rise artificially and excessive spending would lead to increased inflation.

In contrast, the Conservatives have safeguarded public services. For example, from 1964 to 1970, investment in the railways fell by 57 per cent. in real terms under a Labour Government. It rose by 48 per cent. under the Conservatives from 1970 to 1974. It rose by only 13 per cent. under Labour from 1974 to 1979, and it has increased by a staggering 55 per cent. in real terms since 1979. Therefore, we can have low inflation at the same time as good services.

If the Labour party is to safeguard the economy by borrowing, it would have to sell gilt-edged securities at a high level. That would raise inflation. It would also increase taxation. I hope to hear from the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman that the Opposition's proposals would mean raising the basic rate of tax by 10p or 15p, abolishing the ceiling on national insurance, raising the top rate of income tax back to 50p in the pound and reducing the value of many tax reliefs and allowances, as well as imposing a swingeing 9 per cent. surcharge on savers. The Labour party believes that high wages would restore living standards. In fact, they would lead to higher prices——

Mrs. Beckett: I am sorry that I have not had the pleasure of listening to all the hon. Gentleman's speech, but I am struck by his remark about a swingeing 9 per cent. surcharge on savers. I am sure that he will be aware that what we propose is a 9 per cent. charge on investment income above £3,000 and on investments per person at well over £30,000. I am sure that he was a Member of the House when, in 1988, the Government withdrew all help with housing costs from those with capital of £8,000. Today, help with housing costs is lost to those with capital of £3,000 per unit—that could be a couple. In other words, the hon. Gentleman was a Member of the House when the Government really penalised small savers, who have to be those on the lowest incomes or they would not be eligible for consideration in these matters. So we do not need any lectures about penalising savers from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Gregory: I am delighted that the hon. Lady has confirmed that there would be a tax of that nature on savers. She sidestepped the important point that high inflation under Labour eroded the value of people's savings by one third. I would not want to face the electorate of Derby, let alone York, with that appalling track record.

I should like to pursue this further, but time does not permit me. The important point is that Labour would continue to be the party of high inflation, which would affect the interests of the public sector and the vast majority of employers and employees. The defeat of inflation continues to be the core of the Government's economic policy, and in that way we shall ensure a sound and prosperous Britain.

8.55 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Some time ago, I asked Ministers to tell us the price of certain basic foods, and none of them could do so. Can the Minister tell me the price of a pint of milk, a loaf of bread, a tin of beans or a 3 lb bag of potatoes? I should be delighted if he could do so. If he cannot, I must tell him that pensioners, the unemployed and everyone in the country has to purchase those goods to survive. If the Government do not know their cost, they should not be sitting here hypocritically debating inflation.

The Government's attitude to inflation worries me. Their methods of driving down inflation have put 3 million people on the dole. Not long ago, I spoke to a young unemployed man with a family of three. I asked him what was the most important consideration to him. He said,

[Mr. Thomas Graham]

"Obviously, Tommy, taking care of my family, ensuring that we can purchase our groceries, pay for heating and children's clothing and ensuring that our children go to school and are educated." Today that man needs a job. The Government are concentrating on low inflation, but they have thrown millions on the dole.

Inflation is important, but the right to a wage is even more important. I am convinced that the young family to whom I spoke would have liked to earn an average wage, even if it meant a 10 per cent. increase in inflation. I hope that the Minister understands that the right to work is an important part of the fabric of life in Britain. The Government have been so blinded by inflation that they do not see the realities of life. Their policies have driven people into the most abject poverty imaginable to mankind. Britain is supposed to be a high-technology country, but thousands of companies in Strathclyde have gone to the wall. Manufacturing industry has been decimated. In the Strathclyde regional council area alone, 166,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost—more than half its manufacturing base.

Those are mind-boggling figures, yet the Government, who tell us that they are concerned about inflation, are allowing our manufacturing base to go to the wall. If those manufacturing companies were kept open and their workers employed, perhaps we could have zero inflation. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) that it is madness to go for zero inflation. The Government know what I mean by that, so I shall not spell it out.

For the past 10 years, the Tory Government have promised miracle after miracle. The only miracle is that they are still in office. Unemployment is 2·6 million—9·2 per cent. of the work force. Who do we blame when nearly 10 per cent. of our modern society's work force are unemployed instead of making this country a good and fit place to live? Who can believe that 9 per cent. of the work force are unemployed when our schools are falling apart, when there are pot holes in our roads and when hospitals are collapsing? We need regeneration to improve the fabric of our society. We need restructuring—now. After 13 years ——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I must call the hon. Gentleman to order. I refer him to the amendment and the motion, which deal with inflation. If he referred to inflation from time to time, he would keep himself in good order.

Mr. Graham: I take your point, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I am saying that although the Government are obsessed with inflation they are not tackling its root causes. They should ensure that Britain has better infrastructure and a manufacturing base.

I am sure that your house, Madam Deputy Speaker, is nicely furnished. Before furnishing a house, one must decorate the walls and ensure that the floor is secure, that there is water in the taps and that there is a bathroom to flush the waste away. What I am saying to the Government is that they do not have a bathroom to flush the waste away. There is no water to drink for refreshment and no electric current to get the nation going again.

The economy contracted by 2·5 per cent. in 1991—the worst calendar year since the depression of the 1930s. My mother was unfortunate enough to be a young person in that depression in Scotland, but she remembers very well that when someone took ill the people in the close gathered up sixpences to pay the doctor, who came along and did the business. That was how society behaved in the depression of the 1930s.

The Government's drive towards private medicine is preventing many people from getting proper treatment, yet the Government think that inflation is the main problem. What they are doing to the country is savage. Manufacturing investment in 1991 was down 14 per cent. Britain is the only EC country where manufacturing investment is lower than in 1979. The sum of £30 billion in manufacturing investment has been lost because the Government have failed to make such investment at the same rate as Labour. Investment in the whole economy is down 11 per cent. In 1989, the Government spent 0·52 per cent. of the national wealth on civil research and development, compared with 0·92 per cent. in Germany, 0·86 per cent. in France and 0·66 per cent. in Italy. Since 1979, revenue from North sea oil has amounted to more than £100 billion.

Those figures are an indictment of the Government. They have squandered the revenue from North sea oil, which has been dug out in the most savage weather conditions by workers who have seen their compatriots thrown on to the dole. That revenue should have been spent on education, health, training and industry to get everyone back to work.

I ask the Minister to please stop squandering and privatising the nation's wealth. The public built the companies that the Government have given to their friends in the City. The general election will not be long. The time has come when the people of Great Britain want to take back what rightfully belongs to them, not to the Government's rich friends. We should be looking after people who are in need, in hospital and on the dole, and people who are unemployed and handicapped. The Minister should hang his head in shame. I have told him that until I am sick and tired——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have heard enough. If the hon. Gentleman will relate his comments to inflation, I shall listen. If not, he must resume his seat.

Mr. Graham: I have related my remarks to inflation. The Government have mismanaged the economy, inflation and every part of our society. I am delighted that it is not long until the general election when we can show them what is what.

9.5 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): Not only are the Conservatives absolutely useless in Government but it is pathetically clear that they are not shaping up as very much of a parliamentary Opposition. They are struggling to get the hang of holding Supply days. They choose the wrong topics and the wrong decade. Government business managers have recently held Tory Supply days on taxation, privatisation, industrial relations, and now inflation. In his excellent speech, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) said that that was merely an election stunt but, having considered the topics that they have chosen to

debate on their four Supply days, it is clear that they are getting ready to fight the 1979 election rather than the one that is coming in a few weeks.

Do the Government want to debate the recession? We could talk about the longest and deepest recession for 50 years. Do they want to debate unemployment? We have experienced the highest rise in unemployment since records began. Do they want to talk about record mortgage repossessions, business closures, the lack of economic growth or rising crime? No, the Conservatives do not want to discuss those issues. Their choices for debate are tangential and even when discussing the topics that they have singled out for our attention, they spend most of their time attacking a fictional version of the previous Labour Government's record or an invented and highly speculative version of what they allege will be the next Labour Government's record.

Before dealing with current affairs, I must respond to the case made by Conservative hon. Members against the previous Labour Government. I have sat through most of this debate. Has anyone heard any Conservative hon. Member mention, let alone praise, Mr. Anthony Barber? My hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) remembers Lord Barber, the Tory Chancellor, whose monetary policies in 1972 and 1973 stoked up inflation for the incoming Labour Government. That incoming Labour Government inherited inflationary pressures in the economy from the Barber regime and then had to tackle the quadrupling of world oil prices.

The Labour Government cannot be blamed for Anthony Barber or for the quadrupling of world oil prices. The 1974-79 Labour Government deserve credit for getting inflation down to below the average of the Twelve in the European Community. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) said, they did not have the benefits that North sea oil brought to the Conservatives in the 1980s, yet Labour never had a manufacturing deficit. The Conservatives have had one every year since 1983.

Labour ran a higher annual growth rate of 2 per cent. compared with 1·75 per cent. under the successor Tory regime. Mortgage rates under Labour averaged 10·75 per cent. compared with the 1979-92 Tory average of 12·65 per cent., yet the Conservatives claim to be the party of the home owner and pretend that we are not.

Under Labour our share of the world's major manufacturing exports rose from 8·5 per cent. in 1974 to 9·1 per cent. in 1979. By 1984, the Conservatives had got that back down to 7·5 per cent. If investment in our nation's manufacturing base had continued at the same rate of growth as under the Labour Government an extra £30 billion would be invested in manufacturing industry in Britain today.

Instead, it is pitiful that manufacturing investment today is lower than when the Conservatives came to office. We should remember that all this took place under a Labour Government committed as a matter of policy to bearing down on unemployment. In 1979, Saatchi and Saatchi hired actors to pretend to be unemployed workers in a poster campaign with the slogan "Labour isn't working". There is no need to hire actors now. The *Employment Gazette* shows that—without exception—for every single year the Conservatives have been in office the annual average percentage rate of the work force unemployed has been higher than it was under the last Labour Government.

In 1979 the Tory election slogan implied that the Conservatives wished to reduce unemployment. What they have actually done is to maintain it at considerably higher levels every year for the past 13 years. Truly is it said that "Unemployment is nature's way of telling you that you voted Conservative"——

Sir Gerrard Neale: If what the hon. Gentleman says about the Labour Government at that time is correct, perhaps that would explain why there was a sterling crisis under that Government which forced them to devalue. Does the hon. Gentleman put it down to coincidence that both the Labour Governments before the one under discussion had sterling crises and had to devalue?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is trying to rewrite the history of the last Labour Government. Conservative Members always try to depict that period as a grim disaster. It was nothing of the sort. There was much to praise in the last Labour Government's programme, especially given the problems with which they had to deal. The two major problems were inflation, which had been stoked up by the previous Conservative Government led by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) and Chancellor Barber; and the quadrupling of world oil prices. How that Government conducted themselves must be seen in that context.

Mr. Radice: Is it not also true that since 1979 the pound has considerably depreciated against the dollar, the yen and the mark?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend, who made an excellent contribution to the debate, hits on a good point. Ministers do not come to the House and explain their depreciations of the currency. I recall the Prime Minister saying that the Government had no higher duty than to maintain the value of the currency; he did not go on to explain why he has not done that.

Mr. Maples: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not want to mislead the House about the exchange rates. The value of the pound against an average basket of foreign currencies is the same now in real terms as it has been for the past 12 years.

Mr. Brown: The Minister asserts that having first carefully picked his basket of currencies—without referring to the dollar, the yen or the mark, which would have constituted a more relevant comparison.

When discussing anything that has happened since 1979 it is official Government policy to blame someone else for the shortcomings of the past 13 years, but I did think it a little disloyal of the Secretary of State for the Environment to come to the House last week and to blame the rest of the world—in a much better speech than the Prime Minister would have made in similar circumstances. I hasten to add that I make no such charge against the Chief Secretary.

In the 1979 election manifesto, the Conservative party included a section sternly headed, "The control of inflation". It said:

> "To master inflation, proper monetary discipline is essential, with publicly stated targets for the rate of growth of the money supply. At the same time, a gradual reduction in the size of the Government's borrowing requirement is also vital."

The Conservatives, we note, did not mention a gradual reduction in the public sector borrowing requirement being vital over the cycle.

[Mr. Brown]

To the Conservative party led by the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), a gradual decline in the PSBR was vital—full stop. History, alas, does not record whether the present Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer were dissenting voices in those days, but I suspect that they were not. I will lay odds—which would have been attractive to the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) who spoke earlier—that the present Chancellor never had the nerve to say to the right hon. Member for Finchley what he said in Treasury Questions last November. When asked how he would pay for borrowing, he said:

"We shall pay for borrowing by borrowing—that is the normal way in which one pays for it." [*Official Report*, 28 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. 1062.]

I must try that out on my bank manager. I do not think that it will work with him and I am certain that it would not have worked with the previous Prime Minister. It shows how times have changed. We shall find out in a couple of weeks how that line is working for the present Prime Minister.

In its 1979 election manifesto, the Conservative party also said:

"The state takes too much of the nation's income; its share must be steadily reduced. When it spends and borrows too much, taxes, interest rates, prices and unemployment rise so that in the long run there is less wealth with which to improve our standard of living and our social services."

The Conservative party then went on to do the opposite. It increased, not reduced, the share of the nation's income which the state takes, and it has maintained that increase for every year since 1981. By the summer of 1980, the Conservative Government had British inflation running at 21 per cent. The comparable average for the 12 EC countries was 14 per cent. Unemployment was high and rising. The Conservatives' response was to bring about the worst recession since the second world war.

In describing the 1st century Roman conquest of northern Britain, Tacitus said:

"They created a desert and called it stability."

The Conservative approach to north Britain's industrial base has been similar. When Conservatives say, "Oh, the north has not been so much affected by our latest recession", they forget that the north has not yet recovered from the earlier one. The point was effectively underscored by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner).

By 1983, the Conservatives were telling us in their manifesto, under the heading, "Success against inflation", that

"We shall maintain firm control of public spending and borrowing. If Government borrows too much, interest rates rise, and so do mortgage payments."

By 1987, in "We the People"—the right hon. Member for Finchley was using the royal "we" even then—the language had become far more robust. It was even slightly hysterical. The manifesto said:

"Inflation is an evil. As with all cancers, it needs to be completely eradicated. To this end, we shall endeavour to achieve zero inflation."

Oh yes? In view of the Conservatives' previous methods, the more frightening question is "How?". The manifesto continued:

"We shall maintain strict control of public expenditure and borrowing."

There is also a warning against

"extravagant monetary and fiscal policies which would produce hyper-inflation and economic chaos."

I presume that the Chancellor and the Prime Minister have read that.

On the 1988 Budget and its aftermath, I will read to the House an extract from a candid article in an American magazine called *International Economic Insights*. There are more economic insights in the article than we ever get from the Government in the House of Commons. The article, referring to the 1988 boom and its aftermath, says:

"In the latter stages of the boom, however, it was becoming clear that macroeconomic discipline . . . was being threatened by one of the government's microeconomic reforms: deregulation of the financial sector."

This is very honest stuff. The article continues:

"There was an explosion in bank lending in the late 1980s which sent broad money growth soaring into the high teens. That unleashed a boom in asset prices, particularly houses, which generated an unprecedented and unsustainable surge in consumer spending. Government macroeconomic policy then turned to the task of curbing the inflationary consequences of that boom. The main policy instrument was high interest rates"—

as we all know. The article then says:

"Clearly, the reduction in inflation has not been painless."

The people who said that the reduction had not been painless might have thought of that before they allowed it to be stoked up.

The article goes on to state:

"we have had to forgo some output as a price for eliminating its inflationary consequences."

Quite. The author, our own Chancellor of the Exchequer, clearly accepts on the Government's behalf both the blame for the problem and the responsibility for the chosen remedy. In order to bear down on inflation, the Conservatives have engineered in this country the worst recession since the 1930s. They do not know when it will end. Last summer, the Prime Minister told us that

"Britain's position is strengthening month by month."

It was not. The Chancellor, last May, said:

"Things are starting to go rather well for the economy."

They were not. Later, the Chancellor told us that

"The green shoots of economic spring are appearing once again."

That is a poetic image. It turned out to be not so much the "Darling Buds of May" as the "darling buds of maybe". The reason that the green shoots of economic spring are not coming through is, of course, that both the Chancellor and the Prime Minister have been talking to the plants. The Chancellor clearly repeats over and again that

"Rising unemployment and the recession have been the price that we have to pay to get inflation down. That price is well worth paying."

The Prime Minister drones on at the poor little green shoots of economic spring, saying:

"Inflation must go. Ending it cannot be painless. The harsh truth is that if a policy isn't hurting, it isn't working."

No doubt he was half remembering something that his mother told him as a child. In the circumstances, is it surprising that the green shoots of economic spring are not coming out of the ground? They want to be spoken to in a much more soothing manner, probably in a lilting Edinburgh accent.

In 1987, the Conservatives claimed their objective to be zero inflation, yet in 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991 they could not even get inflation down to the EC Twelve average—something that the Labour Government managed to do in their last full year in office. That is not surprising, as, although they claim to be bearing down on

inflation, in a number of key areas the Conservatives were actually stoking it up. As well as VAT increases, to which successive Conservative Governments seem to be addicted, the poll tax made its unique contribution to our inflation rate.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) has pointed out, the Conservatives have also been at it with the public utilities. If one takes the cumulative change in the retail prices index from 1979 to 1981, one finds to one's surprise that the cumulative change is not zero but 135·4 per cent. That is from the party that has inflation as its priority. If one then takes certain public utilities and compares the inflation rate from 1979 to 1991 with the all-items rate—135·4 per cent., let me remind the House—one finds that electricity prices have gone up by 149·1 per cent., that gas prices have gone up by 167·7 per cent., and that telephone charges have gone up by 142·2 per cent., increases that were front-loaded in 1980 and 1981, with percentage increases of 28·2 per cent. and 23·5 per cent. respectively. Perhaps most obscenely of all, water charges have gone up by 265·3 per cent. from 1979 to 1991.

Why should all those items have price rises substantially ahead of the rate of inflation? What possible explanation could one seek? The explanation is pretty obvious. The Government intended to sell off those industries and ensure that the prices rose so that they could get a successful sale. Who pays the price for that successful sale? It is the consumer with Conservative-inspired inflation.

In the debate, Conservative Members asked what Labour would do. They always ask that when they can think of nothing to say. They do not listen or bother to follow the debate. They just say, "Well, what would Labour do?" If they had bothered to read the Labour amendment to the motion, they would see that we call on the Government

"to introduce measures which include support for investment in manufacturing industry and in training, since without such measures inflationary pressures will simply re-emerge."

I am certain that that would be the case.

That policy, combined with our commitment to the exchange rate mechanism, seems to me a sufficiently substantial anti-inflationary policy. Let no one, absolutely no one on the Conservative Benches, try to peddle the misleading statement that the Labour party is not committed to playing its full part within the workings of the ERM and ensuring that it bears down on inflation. We were committed to the ERM well before it became fashionable on the other side of the House. We understand the disciplines that are involved.

However, it is not necessary to spell out from this Front Bench precisely which mechanism at which point in time a Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer would need to use in order to preserve our position. A series of options would be open to a Labour Chancellor, just as a series of options is open to a Conservative Chancellor. Conservative Members know that and know that we shall have a full range of options open to us just as they have a full range of options before them.

In drawing her excellent speech to a conclusion, my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) introduced a further quotation. I should like to refer to it again. But before I do so, hon. Members on both sides of the House will be interested to hear the forecast from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research which was released earlier this evening. It predicts that

"with a continuation of Tory policies unemployment will continue to rise throughout 1992 and 1993. Total investment will fall in 1992 by a further 1·3 per cent. After a fall of 15 per cent. in 1991, manufacturing investment will fall by another 4·9 per cent. in 1992 and that growth will be just 1·3 per cent. in 1992, well down on Norman Lamont's forecasts last November."

Those are the views of an independent institute. There is no recovery here. Indeed, the review comments:

"There is little tangible evidence of any recovery in activity in the early weeks of this year."

I will treat the House again to the quotation that my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South used earlier.

"If we'd known how it would turn out, we wouldn't have done anything different."

Those are not General Custer's last words. They are the words of the Chancellor of the Exchequer explaining why the recovery did not come earlier, and, as we now learn, looks as if it will come substantially later, if at all, under the present regime. My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South made the point that if we have to go through all this again, it is highly unlikely that our fellow citizens will vote to do so. I urge them not to.

9.28 pm

The Economic Secretary of the Treasury (Mr. John Maples): The debate has been characterised by a variety of speeches. It is interesting that, although the opening and closing speeches for the Opposition had some interesting characteristics, and the last one in particular was amusing, neither made any effort to grapple with the issue of inflation or to state what the Labour party's policies would be.

My hon. Friends the Members for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) and for Cornwall, North (Sir G. Neale) reminded us of the serious dangers of inflation to business. My hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) reminded us of the devastating effect that inflation can have on savings. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Sir I. Stewart) pointed out clearly the weaknesses in the Opposition's policy. We were encouraged by my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn) to go for zero inflation. I am afraid that I missed the speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks), for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) and for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), but I am told by my hon. Friend the Minister of State that they were worth reading, and I shall certainly read them.

I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). He is pretty tough on inflation—as tough as us, if not tougher. His intervention on the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) was interesting because she failed to respond to his invitation to say that Labour is serious about inflation.

My hon. Friends and I find that the appalling thing about this debate is having to take lectures on inflation from the Labour party. If one wants to know what will happen in the future it is sometimes interesting to look into the history books. I think that one Labour hero said, "There's no need to look into a crystal ball when you can read the book." The book does not read very well. During the period of the Labour Government, the average inflation rate in Britain was 15·5 per cent. and the average for the European Community was 12 per cent. During the

[Mr. John Maples]

period of this Government, the average inflation rate in Britain has been 7·2 per cent., which has been the average for the European Community.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The effect also matters.

Mr. Maples: Inflation is a bad thing. That may surprise the hon. Gentleman, but it is.

Under Labour, the highest rate of inflation was 26·9 per cent. and the lowest was 7·6 per cent. Under the Government, the average has been 7·2 per cent. Our average rate is lower than Labour's lowest rate.

During that time it is not surprising that M0 was growing at 12 per cent. a year, and public spending was out of control. That resulted in a letter that the then Chancellor of the Exchequer was forced to write to the International Monetary Fund—an interesting document for students of history. I doubt whether a British Chancellor has ever been forced to sign a more humiliating document than the letter that the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) had to write on 15 December 1976, asking the IMF for a standby agreement. Such agreements are usually given by the IMF to bankrupt Latin American countries. He had to apply for a substantial loan and, in the last paragraph of that letter, in effect he had to hand over the control of British economic policy to the president of the IMF.

We do not have much to learn from the Labour party about inflation, but the interesting question is: what has it learnt? The Labour party has had 13 years in which to reflect and to repent. It seems to me that those years have not been spent usefully.

In "Meet the Challenge, Make the Change" in 1989, there is a short paragraph of about 20 lines on inflation. It does not make any effort to say how to deal with the problem, but it contains this amazing, mind-bending sentence:

"Inflation is in fact a complex phenomenon whose causes will vary from one situation to the next."

That is a facile cop-out because it does not say what one does to control inflation.

In 1990, the Labour party went further. In "Looking to the Future", the 1990 policy revision, there is a page on inflation. Again, there are no suggestions on how one would set about keeping it under control, but there is this amazing proposition:

"We propose to develop regular discussions between government, employers, trade unions and others about Britain's economic prospects".

Hon. Members: What is wrong with that?

Mr. Maples: That is not a policy for dealing with inflation. It sounds to me and to my hon. Friends very reminiscent of beer and sandwiches at No. 10. With the new model Labour Treasury team, I suspect that it would have to be shellfish and champagne.

In 1991, "Opportunity Britain" went a little further, as it contained a paragraph headed "Monetary discipline". It is only a heading, it does not say anything about monetary discipline and it dismisses the use of interest rates, calling instead for the use of credit controls.

The subject of credit controls is interesting. I do not know whether Opposition Members have studied the remarks of the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), who has the advantage over all of them of having been a Treasury Minister for a few years. In June 1989, he was reported as saying:

"The Labour Party idea that you should have credit controls is rubbish. There is no way you can control credit except by controlling the price of credit, and the price of credit is Bank Rates."

A couple of weeks later, on 18 June, the Leader of the Opposition said on "Panorama" that we need credit controls. Obviously, he had not read or digested those remarks. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I can forgive him. He has a little difficulty when he is let out alone, and we understand that. Perhaps the more honest comment came from him in that famous "World at One" interview with James Naughtie—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members do not like it. We have the tape of that interview and it makes fascinating listening. When James Naughtie asked the right hon. Gentleman, "What would a Labour Government do to reduce inflation?", after having lost his temper and sworn a little he said, "To cut a long story short, we don't know." We know that he does not know, but it is a pity that some Labour spokesmen are not aware of that.

The debate about credit controls rumbled on. In October 1989, a few months after the remarks by the right hon. Member for Llanelli, the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said in a Walden interview that a Labour Government would impose controls on mortgage lending specifically on people trading up. Of course he realised that if there had to be credit controls they would have to be on mortgage lending, which accounts for more than 80 per cent. of consumer borrowing. A week later the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said that he strongly disagreed and that there was no way in which they would penalise a family who wished to buy a larger house. On that, as on so many matters, there is something of a muddle among Labour Front-Bench spokesmen.

We found especially interesting—this was brought out in the speech by the hon. Member for Derby, South—the fact that the key lever for controlling monetary policy and inflation is interest rates. It is the key lever used by all other members of the exchange rate mechanism, by the Bundesbank and by the Dutch and French central banks. It is also used by the Americans and the Japanese, but apparently we do not need to use it. We went through a ridiculous charade over interest rates and what has been christened Monklands law, which states that whatever interest rates are, they ought to be 1 per cent. lower. That was the case at varying interest rates last year.

The "World At One" is a dangerous programme for Labour's Front-Bench spokesmen because on that programme on 15 November last year the shadow Chancellor was asked by the presenter whether he would like the Government to make further cuts in interest rates. One would have thought that he would say 1 per cent. It had been 1 per cent. all year, so why should it be any different? However, the shadow Chancellor said:

"I would have to take advice about it".

Apparently, he did not need any advice when he was calling for a 1 per cent. cut every two weeks during 1991, but by October he needed advice about it. Perhaps it is good that humility has broken in, because Monklands law was never a sensible policy. The shadow Chancellor's

attitude shows that Labour does not have a serious policy on inflation. It is not serious about interest rates and that shows that Labour is not serious about inflation.

The Labour party recently developed or found by accident a rather convenient fig leaf called the exchange rate mechanism. We are supposed to take seriously its commitment to the ERM, but it is rather difficult to take seriously a party that apparently cannot make up its mind about Europe. *[Interruption.]* Labour supported Britain's entry to the European Community in 1962, opposed it in 1964, supported it in 1966, opposed it in 1971, supported it in 1975, opposed it in 1983 and now Labour supports it again. Every single member of the shadow Cabinet who was in the House in 1972—I have the Division list here—opposed British entry to the Community in 1972 when the Bill on accession to the Community went through Parliament. The Division list contains the names of not only the shadow Chancellor but the Leader of the Opposition. In 1986—only five and a half years ago—14 members of the shadow Cabinet voted against the Single European Act. By chance, I have the Division list for that and among the names are those of the hon. Member for Derby, South and the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). Over the past five and the next 10 years the key to the development of the European Community is the Single European Act and 14 Labour Members, including the two proponents whom we are now supposed to take seriously, voted against it. The 1983 Labour manifesto on which they all ran for election or re-election stated:

"We will also open immediate negotiations with our European Community partners and introduce the necessary legislation to prepare for Britain's withdrawal within the lifetime of a Labour Government."

I have kept until last the words of the Leader of the Opposition. Apparently the keystone of the Opposition's policy on inflation is membership of the exchange rate mechanism. The attitude of leading Labour Members to the ERM and the European Community throws an interesting light on the question whether they can be taken seriously. As usual, the Leader of the Opposition is the somersaulter supreme on this issue. In 1975, in an article in *Tribune*, he said:

"Only the EEC in its political and economic dimensions is the robber of the real sovereignty of the people".

In 1983—he had not changed his mind during those eight years—he said:

"We want out of the Common Market."

In 1988, he had changed his mind. In *The Independent* on 4 February, he was quoted as saying these amazing words:

"I have never seen hostility towards the European Community in the Labour party".

Where had he been? Obviously, he had not been listening to his right hon. and hon. Friends. What is more, he obviously had not been listening to himself.

During the short space of five years, the Labour party has moved from outright opposition to the European Community to fawning acceptance of anything that comes from Brussels. From the way in which Labour Members behave, one would think that Mr. Delors had a large block vote at the Labour party conference. We are supposed to take seriously that Damascene conversion by two or three Labour Members—*[Interruption.]* I am getting enough laughs.

Let us look behind those few members of the Opposition Front Bench whose word we have on that matter. Last week, we had a debate on the economy. Four of the eight Labour Back Benchers who spoke in that debate called for devaluation. That is hardly a ringing endorsement of the Opposition Front-Bench policy. In the debate on the autumn statement, 25 Labour Back Benchers tabled an amendment calling for full-blooded socialism. That is not even consistent with membership of the European Community, let alone the exchange rate mechanism.

What I and some of my hon. Friends wondered during that debate was how many more Labour Members thought the same and would have liked to sign that amendment. We suspect that it was the brave tip of a cowed and gutless iceberg—[HON. MEMBERS: "It is melting."] It is melting fast. The only reason why the Labour party decided to favour the ERM is that the party perceived differences of opinion within the Conservative party about it. When we shot that fox, Labour decided to favour economic and monetary union. Its policy has been driven by disingenuousness and opportunism.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: On the subject of disingenuousness and opportunism, I am sure that the Minister will recall that in the last three of the Conservative party's manifestos one of the key elements of its attack on inflation was its very tough strictures on borrowing. Is that still the case?

Mr. Maples: We shall continue to run a very responsible fiscal policy. We have always done so. I have just checked my copy of the Division list, only to find that the hon. Gentleman voted against the European Single Act. I thought that he might have been about to rise to tell us that we had been mistaken——

Mr. Brown *rose*——

Mr. Maples: The hon. Gentleman has had his opportunity.

Labour's Treasury team has been investing a good many of its lunch hours in the City, trying to persuade people that Labour is now a reformed character and should be allowed out on parole. It would be interesting to hear what some of the City commentators have had to say about that. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary pointed out that almost all of them thought that the advent of a Labour Government would bring an increase in interest rates. Some of them said that interest rates would go up, some said by 4 per cent., but none said that they would go down.

What about inflation? That is the subject of today's debate—*[Interruption.]* I am dealing with the Opposition's policy on inflation. I shall start with James Capel. Who had lunch at James Capel? Will nobody own up to that? James Capel estimates that under Labour, inflation typically would be about 2 per cent. higher. Goldman Sachs has predicted that inflation would be higher under a Labour Government. S. G. Warburg said: "the biggest flaw in Labour's approach concerns the absence of a credible strategy for tackling inflation."

Mr. John Smith *rose*——

Mr. Maples: I am in the middle of a paragraph—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] I shall do so in a minute. I am in the middle of a paragraph and I shall give way when I have finished it. UBS Phillips and Drew——

Mr. Smith *rose*——

Mr. Maples: I am dealing with the City. When I have finished, I will give way to the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

UBS Phillips and Drew said that it was not yet convinced that the Labour party has successfully expelled its inflationary tendencies. I would be especially interested to know—and so should the Leader of the Opposition—who had lunch with UBS Phillips and Drew. Not only did they strike out on interest rates and inflation, they struck out pretty generally. The UBS Phillips and Drew briefing also said:

"It is not hard to ridicule this pot-pourri of supply-side socialism: that unmistakable whiff of failed 1960s policies; the National Investment Bank, surely destined to retrace the history of the National Enterprise Board, picking losers."

Labour talks a lot about investment, but the investment made by its members in lunch hours does not seem to have paid off.

Mrs. Beckett: Has the Minister seen UBS Phillips and Drew's most recent report, which talks about a second Labour Government consolidating their position after a second election victory?

Mr. Maples: That must have been written by someone else. I quote again:

"A pot-pourri of supply side socialism: that unmistakable whiff of failed 1960s policies".

I quoted only about six of the 22 comments that I have before me—none of which is favourable.

Labour has not only failed to convince the City——

Mr. John Smith: The Economic Secretary made a point of quoting Goldman Sachs, to which Conservative Members constantly refer. Did the hon. Gentleman read a day or two ago that the Government's given explanation for the recession—international factors—was described as eyewash by Goldman Sachs? If the Minister believes Goldman Sachs in one instance, why does he not believe it in another?

Mr. Maples: I do not believe anybody on everything, but Goldman Sachs' chief economic adviser has been a consistent supporter of Treasury policies throughout the past 18 months. Goldman Sachs says that, under Labour, interest rates and inflation would increase, and it does not make any very polite comments about Labour policies.

The Opposition are in disarray over several of their policies, but nowhere more so than in respect of their policies on spending and tax. In 1989, the Leader of the Opposition promised:

"At the time of the next General Election, we will set out the accurate costs of our manifesto proposals."

A few months later, the hon. Member for Derby, South said:

"We will begin the detailed costing of the manifesto at the end of next year"—

that is, 1990. We did not get it, and in September 1991, we were told by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham):

"Detailed spending pledges will not be included in Labour's manifesto".

That must be one of the first examples of an election promise being broken before the election has even taken place.

We have done the Opposition's sums for them. We make the cost of their proposal £35 billion—or did. I cannot remember any specific pledges being denied but if any have been, we have no difficulty, because new pledges are added all the time. I could ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary for confirmation, but I believe that the total now is £37 billion or £38 billion.

Under Beckett's law, the hon. Member for Derby, South says that those are not pledges but wishes and prayers. Let us examine a couple of them. In "Opportunity Britain", Labour states that it will increase overseas aid to 0·7 per cent. of GNP. That would cost £2·3 billion. The hon. Member for Derby, South says that is not a pledge, but in his speech to the Labour party conference last year the shadow Foreign Secretary confirmed that target, saying that that was a firm commitment, costed and clear. He pledged that a Labour Government would carry it out. Who are we to believe—the shadow Foreign Secretary or the hon. Member for Derby, South?

Mr. Smith *rose*——

Mr. Maples: I have one more question for the right hon. and learned Gentleman to answer. "Opportunity Britain" stated that Labour

"will increase the basic pension in line with prices or earnings, whichever is the higher".

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East confirmed that at Labour's party conference, when he said:

"Of course that Labour Government will restore the link between retirement pensions and earnings and prices—whichever is the higher."

Who are we to believe in that instance—the shadow Chief Secretary or her boss? The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East did worse. He produced a completely new spending pledge that was not even included in the £35 billion that I mentioned. On 30 December, he said on "World At One"—a dangerous programme for the right hon. and learned Gentleman:

"I would release the capital sums which local authorities have at their disposal".

There is up to £8 billion of those. I do not know whether we are talking about £2 billion, £3 billion or £8 billion. However much it is, it is public spending and it is public borrowing.

Mr. Smith *rose*——

Mr. Maples: The right hon. and learned Gentleman was not even listening when I made my last point, and I have given way several times to Opposition Front Benchers.

I have discovered the secret. I have discovered why the Labour party has difficulties with its arithmetic. Into my hands has fallen an interesting document entitled "The Way to Win: Labour's Campaign Handbook for the 1990s". It provides guidance for Labour candidates, and it contains an interesting section headed "Counting the Votes". I want my right hon. and hon. Friends to listen to this: why Labour has difficulties will be made clear.

The document explains:

"You need to know how many votes you require to win."

That is pretty uncontentious, but it is a little more complicated than it sounds. The document continues:

"For example, Constituency A has 65,000 voters. If the general election turnout is 75 per cent., then the total voting will be 48,750. If only two parties stand, you need 50 per cent. + 1 to win—24,375."

If Labour candidates are thought by the Labour party not to be able to add up to 25,000, it is not surprising that the Opposition Front Bench cannot make it up to £35 billion.

Mr. John Smith: The Economic Secretary referred to expenditure on overseas aid. Will he make it clear,

speaking on behalf of the Government, that the Government are reneging on their commitment to meet the United Nations target?

Mr. Maples: It is a long-term target, as we have made clear. *[Interruption.]* That is exactly the point. The shadow Foreign Secretary said that Labour would meet it in the lifetime of a Parliament: he said that a Labour Government would do it in five years. It is in a list of spending pledges.

I am glad that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East intervened, because I am just coming to him. The right hon. and learned Gentleman represents the respectable face of the Labour party. He is not very consistent about the exchange rate mechanism or European monetary union; he does not have much of a policy on inflation. He ran on a 1983 manifesto. Nevertheless, he represents the respectable face of the Labour party. What we must ask ourselves is whether he represents anyone in the Labour party other than himself. From time to time, he represents his client down in Islwyn; but he certainly does not represent the parliamentary Labour party.

Recently, we have been entertained by a series of articles in the newspapers. They started in *The Guardian* —[HON. MEMBERS: "It is a Tory newspaper."] We are told that it is a Tory newspaper. We had the headline:

"Curious case of the Scot on the rocks".

We learn that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is

"not radical enough",

and

"less clever than he thinks".

We read

"Why the knives are coming out for John Smith",

and

"Why the claws are out for John Smith".

I have quoted from only four of the many newspaper articles that have appeared over the past 10 days.

I originally thought that all this was because Labour Back-Benchers were upset about raising people's taxes if they earned more than £390 a week, or about the idea that raising income tax helped the country to get out of the recession. Then I realised that I had been very naive. The truth was revealed to me in one of the newspaper articles, in which it was made clear that nothing of the sort was the case—that we were seeing a jockeying for position for when Labour lost the next election.

That was set out very succinctly in *The Independent on Sunday*—not, I think, a supporter of the Conservative party—which stated:

"More worrying for Labour is the most convincing theory, that last week's shenanigans constituted elaborate jockeying for the party leadership should Labour fail to become the government. Many within the party detect a pre-emptive strike to damp down Mr. Smith's chances of walking his way to the . . . leadership."

Not only is the right hon. and learned Gentleman not as clever as he thinks; he is not as popular as he thinks.

There are red lines on the carpet in the Chamber so that we cannot stick swords in each other's fronts. Perhaps we should arrange for a red line to be drawn behind the right hon. and learned Gentleman, to make sure that no one can stick a dagger in his back. I hope that it does not happen, but, if we were to find a dagger in his back, whose fingerprints would we find on it? Would they be those of one of the 25 signatories to the amendment to the autumn statement who want socialism, or would they be those of one of the 100-odd other hon. Members who would have liked to sign it but did not? Or would they, perhaps, be those of an acolyte of the Leader of the Opposition, tired of having his economics corrected all the time?

"Nor",

I read in *The Independent on Sunday*,

"is his relationship with Neil Kinnock close, the Labour leader realising that his Shadow Chancellor does not admire his grasp of economics."

That must be the understatement of the year. Whatever the truth may be about the conspiracy against the right hon. and learned Gentleman, he has been seriously wounded by it. He does not have the confidence of his own party, so how can he expect to have the confidence of the nation?

Let me now turn to the hon. Member for Derby, South, the junior partner in this Bearnaise sauce circuit around the City. She likes to pose as a paragon of fiscal virtue. I hope that this is not an indelicate subject to raise in the House, but this is a lady with a past—a very disreputable past. She used to be a socialist. That is no longer fashionable, so she denies it. She used to be very left wing. Ten years ago, she would have been the scourge of the policies that she now espouses. In the 1981 contest for the Labour party leadership, she supported the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] In 1980, this great supporter of the European Community wrote in *Tribune* about the European Community where she described it as

"This selfish, greedy, little clique of countries"

and declared:

"none of the arguments for staying in the European Community can be sustained."

That is the same hon. Member who now lets Mr. Delors write her scripts. She is standing on her head on most of the issues that——

Mrs. Beckett: A couple of things have happened in the meantime that the Minister appears not to have noticed. First, we had a referendum on the European Community which was won by those people who wished to remain in the Community. Secondly, in the 1983 election campaign, the Labour party put a specific option before the country —that we should not remain in the Community. That option was rejected. I am a democrat. I accept the decision of the country. It appears that the Conservative party voted for the European Community and for the Single European Act but that it now wishes that it had not done so.

Mr. Maples: What intellectual rigour, what consistency of principle that can be so easily undermined. I suspect that it is the sniff of office, not the 1983 election defeat, that has brought about the change.

The hon. Lady is also the originator of Beckett's law, which is in tatters. She says one thing; the shadow Cabinet does another. We have already seen a few of the contradictions. The hon. Lady has no credibility and, apparently, no authority within the shadow Cabinet. She has got a £35 billion millstone round her neck and it is going to sink her. After the election, when the Labour party is in opposition, her job will be to run the shadow Chancellor's campaign for leadership of the Labour party.

I do not intend to dwell on the position of the Leader of the Opposition. He has changed his mind not just about a couple of things but about everything that he ever believed in. He used to be a famous left-wing firebrand. He has changed his mind about nuclear disarmament, nationalisation, Europe and even the monarchy.

Mr. Graham: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Maples: No. I am not giving way to anybody else. There are only three minutes of the debate left.

It is difficult to take seriously anything that the Leader of the Opposition says. At the ad-men's bidding, he has given up the principles for which he went into politics and which he has held all his life. It shows through and is pretty shallow. The inflation record of the Labour party when in government was the worst in our history and the worst in the industrialised world. The Labour party has learnt nothing since then. It has no policy on inflation. It refuses to acknowledge that interest rates are the key to controlling inflation—in the words of the Labour party's own leader, when asked what Labour would do to control inflation, "We don't know."

The Labour party has had a sudden, opportunistic conversion to the exchange rate mechanism, but how can we believe its sincerity now when for years it castigated the very idea of Europe and when the whole shadow Cabinet voted against the Single European Act only five years ago? The Labour party has invested heavily in selling its new-found respectability to the City, only to have its policies comprehensively rubbished by City commentators. Labour would have had a massive public spending programme which inevitably would mean higher taxes. Beckett's law is in tatters, contradicted twice in a year by her own boss, the shadow Chancellor. If the shadow Chancellor does not have the confidence of his own parliamentary party, how can he expect to get the confidence of the country?

The Labour party is led by a man whose desperate thirst for office has led him to change his mind on everything he ever believed in, even the monarchy. He is the greatest imposter of them all. Labour has no policies on inflation and no credibility. It is running on the biggest false prospectus since the South Sea bubble and it will be rumbled by the electorate for its opportunism and insincerity.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 188, Noes 324.

Division No. 100] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stratford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terence
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Alton, David
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*

Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bellotti, David
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'l's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carr, Michael
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McCrea, Rev William
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Nicol
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'caster)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and Mr. Tom Sackville.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 304, Noes 201.

Division No. 101] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'l's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rose, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

NOES

Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terence
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:

Mr. Jack Thompson and Mr. Eric Illsley.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House congratulates the Government on its prudent economic policies, which have led to a substantial reduction in inflation; notes that the level of inflation in the United Kingdom has been half that under the previous Government, is now below the average for the European Community and close to the level in Germany; notes further that low inflation is essential to a sustained recovery in output and employment; and draws attention to the policies of Her Majesty's Opposition, which would inevitably lead to higher inflation, higher interest rates and higher unemployment.

Fire Service College

10.26 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): I beg to move,

That the draft Fire Service College Trading Fund Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 11th February, be approved.

The Fire Service college is the central training institution of the British fire service. It is time that it moved on and became a trading fund.

A little history first. The college is a Home Office establishment and, for many years, was mainly financed from the Home Office vote with all fire brigades' staff training being provided free of charge. Two years ago, an agreement was reached with the local authority associations whereby the cost of meeting that training would be met by charges levied by the college with the additional burden on fire authorities being funded through the revenue support grant—initially by top-slicing. The college is scheduled to become an executive agency under the Government's "next steps" programme on 1 April 1992 and full direct charging will be introduced on that date. Thereafter, the college's expenditure will be fully financed by receipts from its customers. If the House approves the order, the college will be the first "next steps" agency to operate as a trading fund from the outset.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that, when he talks about trading receipts, he has it in mind that the Fire Service college will be able to attract custom from the private sector? Big industrial plants, for example, would then be able to have their fire services trained by the Fire Service college. There is an important point for the North Yorkshire fire service and for many others. Would that reduce the charge for our local authority fire services?

Mr. Patten: I agree with my hon. Friend. If the trading fund is set up, the charges levied on the private sector would be such that the charges levied at present on fire authorities will be reduced. The public sector will benefit substantially from the net effects of the order.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): If the private sector has its fire officers trained at Moreton-in-Marsh, given that the college is at full capacity now, the training of fire service officers will have to be curtailed to make room for private services.

Mr. Patten: There is no possibility of that. I envisage that about three quarters of the work of the trading fund "next steps" agency, if the House should approve it, will be involved in training local authorities. Some local authorities are already telling us that they intend to make other training arrangements with new freedoms.

The earlier financial arrangements meant that the college had, in effect, a monopoly in the supply of fire officer training. The introduction of direct charges means that brigades are free to look to any training provider. Although direct competition in the range of courses is limited by the high cost of providing a fully equipped fireground—the college's fireground is, in the proper sense of the word, unique—the college certainly faces competition in future for part of its curriculum. Perhaps I may give a few examples.

The Civil Aviation Authority training school at Teesside, the offshore fire training centre at Montrose, and the Petroleum Training Federation already have particular niches in certain bits of the market. Many college courses are classroom-based. They do not make use of the panoply of fireground facilities and they may be capable of being provided by other training institutes. I also understand on advice that some fire authorities which maintain facilities for technical and recruit training are considering whether it would be more cost-effective to expand their own facilities rather than send their people to Moreton-in-Marsh. That is a perfectly proper thing for a fire authority to choose to do.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Could not it be said that the existing college has the facilities of all fire services throughout the country because they sent their officers there to be trained? Do we take it from what the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) said that we are witnessing the privatisation of the training of officers and, therefore, the first step to the privatisation of the fire services? That would leave many communities vulnerable because of the Government's cuts in local government services. Is this not the first step to privatisation?

Mr. Patten: The hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) raised two separate points about vulnerability. Under the charge of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department, the fire services inspectorate ensures that a proper level of fire cover is maintained in all parts of the kingdom. On the hon. Gentleman's first point, we are not seeing the first steps to privatisation. Hon. Members know what the Government are like—we do not mess about; if we thought that it was right to privatise, we would privatise straight away.

At the moment, the move to a trading fund and a "next steps" agency status will enable enormous benefits in fire service training. In particular, 450 commercial companies wish to pay the full cost—a substantial sum indeed—for student weeks of fire training, which means that the sums charged to fire authorities will be substantially reduced. That is a bargain to the public sector. By the time I have explained that matter, I should be very surprised if any hon. Members would think of voting against this important order.

The order is fully consistent with the principles underlying the White Paper "Competing for Quality". The college always has provided and intends to continue to provide a highly professional training service, and I pay tribute to those in the fire service training college for what they do. The college is first-rate and it has a worldwide reputation. The establishment of a trading fund will provide the college with greater financial flexibilities, in particular enabling it to react much more quickly to changing demand from those who want to use its services.

I now refer to the order itself. Articles 1 and 2 state that the college will become a trading fund on 1 April, to coincide with the start of the financial year. The college, as I am sure that the House knows, is established under section 23 of the Fire Services Act 1947, under which the Secretary of State may establish and maintain a central training institution for providing courses of instruction in matters relating to fire services. We propose that all the operations of the college should be financed through the trading fund.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does the Minister accept that this will be about the 58th "next steps" agency? Will it be any more accountable directly to Members of Parliament than any of the other 57? Questions tabled about agencies never see the light of day in *Hansard* or any other publication that is readily available to Members. Will the Minister guarantee that, when Members table questions, ministerial responsibility will be accepted for the college and that answers to those questions will appear in *Hansard*?

Mr. Patten: Day-to-day responsibility for the agency, as for other agencies, will reside in the chief executive designate, who will deal with normal operational matters. Broader policy matters are, of course, for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and Lord Ferrers, who has ministerial responsibility for the matter.

Article 3 provides that any loans issued to the trading fund will be made from the Home Office vote, while article 4(1) and the schedule establish the assets and liabilities which will be appropriated to the trading fund on 1 April.

Article 4(2) provides the percentage of the net assets appropriated to the fund to be financed by public dividend capital. As the House knows, that is the public sector equivalent of share capital in a company or an equity stake in a business.

Article 5 provides that the maximum amount of loan which may be issued to the fund shall be set at £15 million. That relates to new loans that may be needed after 1 April 1992. That is set at such a level as to ensure that in a period of about four years the House will have an opportunity to debate whether the loan needs to be examined and increased. That means that the House will be able to debate the future of the college as a trading fund. Perhaps at that stage privatisation issues may emerge.

I should also tell the House about the pricing policy that the college proposes to adopt. For some years the college has provided training, albeit on a small scale, for private sector companies such as those in the chemicals and petroleum industries, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) referred. The college has been established and maintained for many years by public funds. It has a large staff of professional firefighters of great expertise seconded from brigades. Therefore, it is right and proper that the charges made to the private sector should take account of that public investment. Course fees for that sector will be set above full cost. In other words, the private sector will be charged more than the full cost per student week at a level which the market will bear.

Conversely, the college will aim in its strategy to charge the statutory fire authorities prices which are substantially below full cost. Thus the fire authorities will benefit, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale highlighted, from the new arrangements. Those fees will be below full cost but income from other customers will allow the college to meet its overall financial objectives. That is a very good deal for the public sector.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The Minister says that there will be a substantial take-up of places by the private sector. One can imagine that in the first years that take-up will be substantial. But if it is not maintained at a substantial level and there is a fall-off—for example, if recessionary conditions continue and the private sector is unable to take up those places—under the Minister's arrangements the fire authorities would inevitably find themselves having to pay a great deal more than the sums that he has in mind.

Mr. Patten: I do not believe that that would be so. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the trading difficulties that face several companies in the private sector which need to train firefighters at this time. If at this point in the economic cycle we have 450 outstanding applications, I doubt that in two or three years there will be sufficient capacity. The hon. Gentleman's worry might well be in the other direction.

By next year the private sector may well be charged —these are not exact figures—about £1,100 a week for the average course whereas the public sector would be charged about £600 a week. That is a substantial difference and a bargain for the public sector. That is why we have introduced the order.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: Of course. I am glad to see a Member from Lancashire rising, to join the Yorkshire Members.

Mr. McCartney: Can the Minister tell that I come from Lancashire by my accent?

Mr. Patten: I shall make no racist remarks.

Mr. McCartney: He should not make any sizeist ones either.

The Minister is trying to paint a rosy picture of a bargain for local authorities. Is it not the truth that the £595 per week student course—if that is the exact figure —is an increase from £219 per week on the previous year? For my local authority that means an immediate increase of £330,000, none of which has been taken into account in terms of next year's standard spending assessment. That is a huge hike in costs for local authority fire services.

Mr. Patten: That is why there is a 16 per cent. increase in provision for fire authorities in the current year and why next year there will be a further 8·4 per cent. increase in provision—representing a substantial increase above inflation—and increases in pay for firefighters. As I am sure the House knows, although training is important, the amount of money devoted to it by fire authorities is a small part of their overall budget.

Mr. Flynn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Patten: I should not mind making a spot of progress but I shall give way because the hon. Gentleman has a nice smile.

Mr. Flynn: I am sure that the increases that the Minister mentioned are genuine, but will he look at a recent parliamentary answer which established that one of the unexpected effects of recession is a great increase in fires, especially those started by owners who are about to go into receivership, and who have set fire to their factories?

Mr. Patten: The reports are partly speculative. We will have to study a run of figures for several years to find out if what has happened in the past year or 18 months represents the trend to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

Perhaps I could return to my speech. Subject to the draft order being approved, the Treasury proposes to lay a minute before the House setting out the financial objective for the college—which my right hon. Friend the

[Mr. Patten]

Home Secretary has set—which will be to make an average real rate of return in the next three years of not less than 6·5 per cent. on capital employed, on the basis of reasonable prospects for the future. The college certainly forecasts that it will be able to achieve that.

In response to earlier concerns about provision of training for the public sector, let me say that about 80 per cent. of the 1992-93 target figure for United Kingdom fire service student weeks has already been confirmed. That means that bookings by the majority of fire authorities have been accepted and are already in place. That represents an investment by authorities of about £9 million, ranging from smaller authorities spending perhaps £60,000 on training to the larger authorities spending about £300,000 per year. There is also great interest from the commercial and international sectors by reason of the college's exceptional facilities. It is late at night, but it is worthwhile recording the facilities at Moreton-in-Marsh. There is a full-scale replica shopping mall, industrial buildings, a chemical plant, a stretch of motorway, and aircraft, ship and railway complexes, providing for realistic hot fire training in the wide range of environments which firefighters may sometimes encounter. That is why 450 companies are queuing up to join in the training there, to spend money and to reduce the burden on the chargepayer and the taxpayer.

Before laying the draft order, we placed in the Libraries of both Houses, in accordance with sections 1 and 6 of the Government Trading Funds Act 1973, a report on the consultations conducted about trading fund status for the fire service college. As the report shows, no concerns about trading fund status were expressed to us by any person. At present the staff of the fire authorities account for about 90 per cent. of college places. Although the level of courses that that figure implies is set to rise, we expect the proportion of courses dedicated to fire brigade staff to remain substantial. Government support to the college will continue at its present high level, as it will to the United Kingdom fire service.

The fire service college has done a good job to date. Its capacity to do so in the future will be enhanced should this order be approved tonight. The flexibility that trading fund status will give is important. It is a classic example of obtaining better value for money for the taxpayer and for the community charge payer. A vote against the order is a vote in favour of charging our fire authorities higher prices for training, thereby costing the chargepayer and the taxpayer more. I commend the order to the House.

10.44 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): The way in which the Minister ran through his speech without any real feeling for the difficulties faced by the fire services was quite breathtaking. Anyone who speaks to senior fire service officers and men and women in the service at all levels and in all parts of the country will find that the service is heading for disarray and disorder. The story is everywhere the same, and the order is at the heart of the concern. Lack of morale, uncertainty, bitterness and fear for the future all centre on the order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. This is not the occasion for a general debate on fire services. It is a narrow debate on the funding of the college.

Mr. Sheerman: I know that it is a narrow debate, and the whole of my speech will focus on that.

The Minister was complacent about the background to the order and, as a brief preface to my speech, I must make known the genuine concern in the fire service and the fact that the order is at the centre of that concern. The proposed status of the service is at the heart of the problems it faces.

Mr. O'Brien: One of our worries about the privatisation of the training college is that it will cost fire authorities more. That will lead to a reduction in the number of personnel or in equipment, thus reducing fire cover for many communities. Morale in the service is reducing, because people know that the order will reduce the services and resources of fire authorities. That has an impact on the morale of men in the force.

Mr. Sheerman: My hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) puts his finger on the precise problem. What happens to the college and to the nature of training will affect the service that can be provided by fire authorities, which to date have provided a service that is second to none.

The order increases the problems faced by the fire service in maintaining the security of people all over Britain. We have evidence of the concern of specific authorities not far from your constituency, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that concern focuses on the training college.

The Opposition oppose the order, and we are not alone in opposing the move to agency status. Whatever the Minister says, we know that the Fire Brigades Union, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the National Association of Fire Officers are opposed to the move, and the Association of County Councils disagree with the decision on agency status. The Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists is worried about the order. All those organisations fear that agency status and direct charging for courses will lead to a reduction in the training that fire authorities can afford. That will mean a reduction in the high standards of firefighting that Britain enjoys, and we shall face the risk that the college will not be financially viable.

The Minister, as ever, painted a rosy picture of a move to agency status followed in three years by privatisation. He was quite candid about that. Many fire authorities are already under considerable financial pressure because of inadequate standard spending assessments. For example, SSAs take no account of non-fire emergency rescue services. That relates to people locked in or out of premises or trapped in lifts. Those of us who have a motorway through our constituency know about the enormous— *[Interruption.]* With typical arrogance, the Minister turns up his nose and screws up his eyes as if he does not want to hear the truth. The truth about the order is that all the services are under threat. The Minister said that a stretch of motorway has been built at the college. One of the training courses in the college is for the non-fire emergency. Those emergencies account for 77 per cent. of the growth in the calls on the fire service.

The growth in fire emergencies is about 7 per cent. per annum; for non-fire emergencies, the growth is 77 per cent. The SSA takes no account of those emergencies. That is what lies behind the whole problem with the college. It provides the training to get people out of wrecked cars and the worst sort of situations, as well as the more familiar

incidents of people locked in premises, flooded premises and cats up trees. Those services represent 39·4 per cent. of emergency services provided, for example, by the London fire brigade. It represents a 71 per cent. increase since 1985-86.

In addition, the SSAs make insufficient allowance for the cost of fire service pensions. I will not go into that tonight, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I would be out of order, but it must be said that those pensions have to be paid for out of revenue. It is a rapidly rising cost as a proportion of revenue budgets.

The order, which provides for direct funding of the college, puts even greater pressure on budgets. Indeed, this financial year, two major fire authorities were unable to send anyone to the college. What sort of country do we live in when two major fire authorities can no longer send their officers to the premier training centre in the country? That is a severe condemnation——

Mr. John Patten: As a matter of fact, the college has undertaken, and will continue to undertake, to meet all training demands made by local authority fire brigades before accepting applications from the commercial sector.

Mr. Sheerman: That does not solve the problem if a fire authority cannot afford to send the officers.

Her Majesty's inspector of fire services expressed his concern about brigades being unable to send officers to train on those excellent courses. Perhaps the Minister will intervene yet again to say why the inspector is concerned. If the Government, the Home Secretary and his team are not concerned, why is the inspector concerned that the ability to send men and women on those courses will be lost?

The problem from this April onwards will be far more dire. Instead of phasing in direct charging over three years, the Government have rushed into full direct charging and have abolished top slicing. That means that, this April, fire authorities will have to pay the full cost of training their fire fighters at the college. Many authorities simply do not have the money to pay for the training that they need. It is nothing short of a scandal. Our authorities are having to make choices between cuts in training and cuts in other budget areas.

It is not often that I pray in aid Buckinghamshire, but I understand that that authority is proposing to close four retained fire stations—not because they are unnecessary, not because they do not provide good cover for some of the surburban areas that are becoming increasingly a problem to service in prompt time, but because the authority can save £90,000 and so pay for its staff to go to the college. Perhaps the Minister will deal with that point about Buckinghamshire.

Mr. John Patten: Does that have anything to do with the order?

Mr. Sheerman: It has everything to do with it. The Minister does not need your protection, Mr. Deputy Speaker. During his 20-minute speech, he mentioned privatisation, the kitchen sink, his pet dog, the smiles on the faces of my hon. Friends, and everything else—but he was not called to order. Now the right hon. Gentleman seeks the protection of the Chair, as he usually does, because he is frightened of a good debate.

Only the day before yesterday, the Minister fled from a television studio, frightened to enter into debate with Opposition Members because his boss, the Home Secretary, had sent out an edict saying that Government Ministers must not appear with shadow Ministers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Let us return to the debate on the order.

Mr. Sheerman: The Minister fled from the television studios. I want to debate this order on television, before a wider audience—but the right hon. Gentleman has been forbidden to appear because he will get a drubbing, as he gets a drubbing over law and order and everything else. The Minister is frightened to go into a television studio with me—terrified.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Let us return to the order, please.

Mr. Sheerman: In a democracy, we should be able to debate such matters with Ministers on television, without them running away.

My own county is spending £250,000 on training, although it estimates the cost of its training needs at £500,000, and has been advised by the college that it should spend £750,000. Councillor Laurence Conlan, chairman of West Yorkshire fire authority, is extremely concerned that it cannot meet the desired training standards. Is it not a condemnation of the order that the chairman of a leading fire authority such as West Yorkshire is deeply concerned that neither he nor the authority are fulfilling their obligations because of the effects of the Home Office decision on fire service training? The consequences of implementing the order will be even more dire.

The detrimental effect of the move to training fund status can be judged by a written answer that I recently received from the Minister. I asked:

"how many student places have been confirmed for *(a)* local authority financed brigades and *(b)* industrial and overseas courses at the fire service college for the year beginning April 1992".

Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman is not interested in my question or the answer that he gave. Because they are not mentioned in his brief, he will not intervene. Instead, another little piece of paper will come from the Box. The Minister replied:

"Three thousand, three hundred and forty-eight places covering 13,019 student weeks have so far been confirmed for local authority fire brigades for the year from 1 April 1992. One hundred and sixty-nine places covering 263 student weeks have been confirmed for the industrial and overseas sectors"—[*Official Report*, 11 February 1992; Vol. 203, c. 439.]

On that basis, it is highly unlikely that the college will reach its income targets and be at all viable in its first year as a training fund. That serious situation was totally covered up and disguised by the Minister's remarks this evening. My remarks are based on the right hon. Gentleman's written answer, which was presumably prepared by civil servants and is correct. The Minister knows that there is a severe problem in funding the college on the basis that he introduced tonight.

The IPMS estimates that the total income from courses so far booked will be £7·969 million, but it is estimated that the college needs an income of £17·4 million. There may be some late bookings, but it is unlikely that the number of student weeks needed on which the college is operating this year will be achieved. This year, 19,000 to 20,000 student weeks are booked.

[Mr. Sheerman]

The college hoped to make more money by offering courses overseas and for other non-fire work, but they have not materialised in sufficient numbers. In any event, if the college looks overseas and to industrial needs, it will gradually move away from its key role as a provider of national fire service training.

There are additional problems in this brave new world of privatisation, which puts the market before public safety. Some authorities are telling their firefighters that, if they move to a different authority within three years of attending a training course, they will have to pay back the cost of their training. Can you imagine, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what the order will do to the mobility of trained personnel? What if teachers, or members of any other profession, had to repay the costs of their training before they could move? This is a recipe for disaster—for the decimation of a public service.

It is absurd. A well-trained fire officer is what we have always considered him to be: a national asset, wherever he —or she—is stationed. The move to trading fund status is short-sighted. As usual with the Government, it displays more concern for the ideology of political dogma than for the safety of the public. *[Interruption.]* It is about time the hon. Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) read a few books. I can tell him that, in a few weeks, he will have a damn sight more time to do so. He will have many quiet hours on the Opposition Back Benches in which to read them—piles of them. We shall send a few books to educate him, although it is probably too late. We might even send him to the fire service college for training, if he could obtain the entrance qualifications.

As I was saying, the move to trading fund status is short-sighted, and displays more concern for political dogma than for the safety of our public. That is typical of what Opposition Members have come to expect from the Government. The fire service college has always been seen as a national asset. What is wrong with one of the best fire colleges in the world providing training for overseas forces? Indeed, why should it not offer the same service to the private sector? We do not disagree with that. What we oppose is the proposal to destroy its very base—to move it into the private sector, and endanger its future and its ability to remain as a centre.

This centre has offered high-quality training to our fire brigades. Now all that is to be jeopardised in pursuit of a market approach that will leave some brigades with inadequately trained staff, and may force the college to close. We are making a fuss about the order because this is a question of public safety. It is a question of whether the country can provide a proper response to the numerous fires that still occur, and—tragically—kill people, usually in the residential sector. The service to residential areas needs constantly to be improved; it does not need to be watered down. We have to get machines, men and women to those fires to save young lives every year, to try to lower the number of desperate casualties. The order will undermine the ability of our public service to do that.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): The hon. Gentleman is suggesting to the public that, as a result of the order, the 54 fire brigades in England and Wales will not provide the same standard of service. Are not those brigades inspected by Her Majesty's chief inspector of fire services to ensure that their very high standards are maintained? There is no question of any diminution in standards of fire cover or excellence.

Mr. Sheerman: I am sorry that especially the Chairman of the Select Committee on Home Affairs has got it wrong. If he did his homework and a little more reading of Her Majesty's inspectors' reports instead of getting the Clerks to read them, he would find that time and time again they have expressed their concern about declining standards in individual forces throughout the country. They have expressed concern about the enormous backlog in the checking of safety standards in, for example, health premises.

Sir John Wheeler: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sheerman: No. Time is short and a number of my hon. Friends want to speak in this important debate. Yet again, the hon. Gentleman shows his ignorance of these matters.

We believe that public safety should be the paramount consideration. This is an ill-considered move by the Government. Its implementation is being botched. We intend to reverse it as soon as we form the Government in a few weeks' time. After the election, we shall restore the college to its former position as a national asset. We shall provide all fire brigades with the training they need to keep the public safe and secure. That we pledge, and we shall do it in a few short weeks.

11.6 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I do not intend to detain the House for long, having largely covered the point that I wanted to make when my right hon. Friend the Minister of State kindly allowed me to intervene during his speech. However, having listened to what the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) had to say about fire service standards, I hope that you will find that a few comments by me are in order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so that I may refute some of his allegations.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) is here. We discussed this matter privately in the Select Committee on Home Affairs when considering what issues the Committee ought to investigate. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that it is regrettable that during the lifetime of this Parliament we have not had the opportunity thoroughly to investigate the fire service. We did the next best thing. We invited Her Majesty's chief inspector of fire services, Sir Reginald Doyle, to come before the Committee and give evidence.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield has just made two allegations. First, he said that the chief inspector of fire services was unhappy about the standard of the service. On 27 November the chief inspector told the Committee that there had been 31 applications to the Home Secretary to reduce brigade establishments because review of the fire cover, based on the 1985 fire cover standards, had proved that there was substantial over-provision. That is precisely what happened in north Yorkshire and in my own constituency.

If the hon. Gentleman reads the Select Committee's report he will find that I raised the matter with Her Majesty's chief inspector and that what was considered to be over-provision in terms of Home Office standards of cover was not regarded as over-provision by the general public. Therefore, the expected reduction in cover in north Yorkshire was postponed, although I am pleased to be able to tell my right hon. Friend that we have gone ahead with the improvements that were also recommended. The whole process has led to a strengthening, not to a reduction, of the fire cover in north Yorkshire.

The hon. Gentleman also made a specific allegation about inspections for the purpose of granting fire certificates.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is a long way from the order which is before the House. I can understand the hon. Gentleman's position. It is one thing for an hon. Member, by way of illustration, to quote a remark, and quite another for another hon. Member to seek to expand that into a general debate about matters other than those before the House.

Mr. Greenway: I did say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the permission of yourself and of the House.

The number of outstanding inspections has reduced over the past year from 3,041 to 1,823. The blame for the number still outstanding rests squarely on the inability to recruit inspectors in the London area. That is a problem across the whole public sector in London.

I do not believe that what the House is being asked to approve is unique. I was not a Member in 1968—I had not left school much before then—but if I remember correctly, in 1968 the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), when Postmaster-General, made the Post Office into a trading fund. So we are not being asked to consider a new proposal.

I am a great enthusiast of the "next steps" agency programme. The Select Committee on Home Affairs considered the forensic science service, the passport office and the immigration service and "next steps" agency status was very attractive. *[Interruption.]* It is all very well Opposition Members barracking, but from my discussions with some Opposition Members who are not in their places tonight but who came to the House in 1987, as I did, I think that they are beginning to see some of the benefits of "next steps" agencies. In the unlikely event of the Labour party forming the next Government, I suspect that the recent programme of "next steps" agencies would be continued.

Three matters are crucial to the consideration of the order. The first is whether, by this process, there will be any reduction in the training of fire service personnel employed by the public sector. My right hon. Friend gave an assurance about that, but I ask him to go further. When he replies, will he give the House an assurance that if there is evidence of difficulty he will not hesitate to come back to the House, or consider the matter with the chief fire inspector, who did not raise it with us——

Mr. John Patten: I am happy to give that assurance to my hon. Friend now. I have already said that in three or four years it will be necessary to consider the loan provisions. That will provide an opportunity for a proper debate in the House again about the future. If at that stage right hon. and hon. Gentlemen want to raise issues concerned with adequacy or inadequacy, privatisation or state ownership, they can be considered then.

Mr. Greenway: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I do not think that the House could have expected any more categorical assurance than that.

Accountability was also raised by the hon. Member for Huddersfield. That is precisely the role of Her Majesty's chief inspector. When Sir Reginald Doyle appeared before the Select Committee in December I think that all members of the Committee, from both sides of the House, were greatly reassured by the way in which he gave his evidence and the way in which he has carried out his task. I do not think that the House needs constantly to ask questions about matters which are already the subject of close scrutiny by a chief inspector, whether in the fire service or in the police service. Hon. Members have been making a meal of that point.

The trading fund will receive money from both the public and private sectors. The public sector is getting something of a bargain from this arrangement. Because of the high level of expertise involved in the training of fire personnel, I can understand why industries, particularly those involved in industrial processes where there is a risk of fire, want to have their personnel properly trained at the establishment at Moreton-in-Marsh. My right hon. Friend the Minister suggested that 450 commercial companies are queuing up to take advantage of the facility and to pay over the odds. Perhaps my right hon. Friend can confirm that that provides an opportunity for expansion of the fire training college, not a contraction, which is what the hon. Member for Huddersfield seemed to suggest. As I have said, the public sector is being charged below full cost and that will be a bargain for the state purse.

[Mr. Greenway]

As a Yorkshire man, I can understand why other hon. Members representing the West Yorkshire service are concerned about funding problems that may arise in the immediate future because of other factors such as standing spending assessments. We saw difficulties last year with the West Yorkshire constabulary. I know that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary considered that and a number of us made representations about it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North said, there is a question of priorities.

We are dealing with a principle that can provide for the better training of fire personnel in both public and private sectors. Those personnel will be trained at a reasonable cost to the state purse and there will be an expansion of training. The House is being asked to approve a medium to long-term opportunity. Although there may be some genuine difficulties that my right hon. Friend the Minister and my noble Friend Lord Ferrers in another place may wish to address, the principle of what we are being asked to approve is compelling.

11.17 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): I shall be brief as other hon. Members wish to contribute. I accept your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about the order being narrow, and I shall attempt to abide by your wishes. I am sure that you will appreciate that an order such as this affects the budgets of local fire authorities.

My fire authority in West Yorkshire will be in some difficulty as a result of the order. We are all aware that, before 1991, attendance was free. The only costs falling to the fire authorities were travel, out-of-pocket expenses and temporary promotion to cover for the absence of staff involved. The charge for attendance in 1991-92 was £219 per student week, representing about one third of the full cost. The charge for West Yorkshire in 1992-93, assuming normal usage, would be £595 per student week. The only way to gain a reduction would be for West Yorkshire to commit itself over a three-year period and to take up many more course weeks than it needs.

The number of student weeks required for 1992-93, given no budgetary restrictions, is 840, at an approximate cost of £500,000. Due to budget constraints, West Yorkshire can afford only 378 weeks, at a total cost of £225,000. If those figures are correct, West Yorkshire will lack 422 weeks training. Some serious cuts have been made to enable the authority to provide that insufficient training. On 21 February, the council agreed to cut £833,000 from next year's firefighting budget to escape poll tax capping. More than £54 million is needed to enable the service to stand still in 1992-93, but the Government have limited spending to £52·1 million.

The county fire authority will use £1·3 million from balances to offset the shortfall but will still be forced to make cuts totalling £833,000. Savings of £533,000 will be made by a further 12-month freeze on recruitment and of £280,000 by reducing attendances at the national fire service college. The West Yorkshire force has vacancies for 133 firefighters, and because of the budgets proposed for 1992-93, they will increase by a further 90.

As the Minister will be aware, the Fire Services Act 1947 requires a fire authority to provide the services for its area of such a fire brigade and such equipment as may be necessary to meet efficiently all normal requirements and the efficient training of the members of the fire brigade. The service has a statutory obligation to train its members. West Yorkshire fire authority is unable to do that for 1992-93.

Despite its severe budget restraints, and recognising that it must conduct some training, the force has had to forgo some other activities. It appears that Pontefract fire authority has made the serious decision to withdraw emergency services from Pontefract fire station to enable it to send officers to the training school.

Emergency services in Pontefract are directly at the crossroads of the M62, the A1 and major collieries and chemical plants. Special services are required to deal with major accidents and calamities. We are risking people's lives to enable the authority to work within its budgets. If that continues, it will be unable to use its equipment and fire officers will not be trained to fulfil their duties.

The order will cause the West Yorkshire fire service serious problems. I hope that the Minister will have second thoughts and will recognise the points that I have made.

11.23 pm

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): I intervene briefly, having been stimulated to do so by the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse), who made a point about the shortage of funds in his fire brigade area. In evidence to the Select Committee on Home Affairs, the chief inspector of fire services, Sir Reginald Doyle, said:

"And yet we are still losing millions of pounds because there has not been proper management of staffing at Bank Holidays."

If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about the availability of resources in his fire brigade area, before the brigade cuts training or closes a vital service, he should ask about bank holiday working. Then he should ask further questions about sick leave. If he probes deeply enough, he will discover that the money about which he is so concerned can be recovered through an improvement in the management of the sick leave arrangements. There would then be no need for his brigade to cut training at the fire service college.

The order is entirely pragmatic. It will be in the best interests of the fire service in England and Wales. It will improve training arrangements and offer many opportunities for the fire service in the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

11.25 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): As we debate this order, a fire service somewhere in the country will be fighting a fire, and it will depend on the training, skill and expertise of the firefighter, the person in charge of the tender and the station officer whether they and the person they are trying to save will get out alive and without serious injury. That is why the college was originally set up in the 1960s under the Fire Services Act 1947.

Paragraph 1(a) of the order proposes a major change in the way in which the organisation will be funded. In the 1960s, the Holroyd committee reported to the House on the formation of a national centre of training excellence for the fire service. Under the 1947 Act, the House determined—through the Home Secretary of the day—to set up such a centre. It was set up to provide open and free opportunities for people to receive the necessary training

to enable them to carry out effectively their responsibilities to other members of the service and to the community. It was the final piece of the jigsaw in the setting up of a training facility to enhance a truly national, professional fire service, disciplined and dedicated to the provision of fire safety facilities in the United Kingdom.

The order sets back 30 years of commitment to the provision of a national centre of excellence, based on the concept of all brigades being involved in training to agreed standards and of the knowledge and expertise of all brigades being brought together so that training standards would improve and initiatives taken in research and development for the better use of fire service facilities and the production of new machinery and techniques. The order changes that dramatically, with the introduction of the charging principle.

The Minister tried to give the impression that there has been no opposition to the proposals, but he told only half the story. When the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council met to consider the proposals, the unanimous view was that the proposals were unacceptable and, in the long term, a bad move for the management of the fire service in the United Kingdom. It was believed that they would undermine the very concept of the national training curriculum. The professional advice given to the Government has been unanimously opposed to the proposals, but the Minister implied that there had been no opposition to training fund status. That is only part of the tale. Advisers have opposed the proposals because of the principle of direct charging.

In 1991-92, my own authority—the Greater Manchester fire service—purchased 884 student weeks. It is the second largest fire authority in Europe. The price of a week was £219 per student. By 1992-93, the cost per student week will have risen to £595. The Minister has already confirmed that. That all amounts to £330,000 in additional costs not allowed for by a corresponding increase in the SSA.

The Guardian of 25 February included an article by the paper's labour correspondent, who had this to say about the problems affecting fire authorities because of direct charging:

"Last week, the Association of County Councils considered problems that have arisen within the Fire Service since arrangements were changed to require brigades to pay the Fire Service College directly for training their employees. Some Fire authorities have been demanding repayment of officers' training costs when they moved to another authority. The ACC personnel sub-committee recommended that Fire authorities be told to keep to the spirit of the Purple Book agreement and recoup training costs only from officers leaving the Service. Extending repayment provisions to officers moving within the Fire Service could inhibit movement and 'could also make officers reluctant to go on training courses'."

The major problems being created for brigades throughout the country are clearly evident from that.

After more than 30 years of cross-party acceptance of the idea of a national training scheme based at the national college, where personnel can improve their professionalism, these proposals seem nonsense. The college is acknowledged to be the best in the world, and the courses for officers and for junior officers are recognised as the premier courses of their kind.

To ensure the continuing quality of senior officers in the fire brigades in years to come, it is vital that, by means of this college, we maintain a throughput of brigade staff from all the fire brigades in the country. Hence the idea of free access: it meant that skilled personnel developing a professional approach to the management of our fire services continually passed through the college. That is the very principle that the Government are attacking.

I want to ask the Minister of State some questions; I hope that he will get out his pen and think about them. From article 2, it is clear that the Secretary of State will consult the chief executive designate about the control and running of the college. Following the appointment of the chief executive, will future appointments be made from among officers working in local authority brigades? Will the commandant of the college continue to be someone involved in the running of the fire services in Britain, or will he be brought in from outside the service?

Will the resources identified in article 1(a) for 1992-93 for the costs of going to the college be ring-fenced by the Department to ensure that the money will be used to send people to the college? What proportion of the standard spending assessment does the Home Office intend to commit to training places at the college?

Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman clarify the make-up of those who will serve on the advisory body? Will he ensure that representatives of local authority associations serve on it; and that the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association and the Fire Brigades Union serve on it? Will he guarantee that they will continue to serve once the agency is set up after 1 April? It is important that the Minister assure us that the board will be made up of those serving in the fire service and of the trade unions.

11.35 pm

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I might have had more sympathy with some of the Minister's views if I had believed that he was intent on providing a service of better quality. Instead, the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) talked only about value for money. During my time in the fire service, it was value for life that mattered, not value for money. Life was the essential ingredient, and Moreton-in-Marsh college has provided value for life. The training scheme was based on the premise that saving life was the predominant factor.

By setting up a trading fund, it is clear that the Minister is concerned more with financial considerations than with saving life. That is something that I cannot and will not accept, and I hope that we shall vote against this measure.

Moreton-in-Marsh has provided training and expertise for fire officers in the United Kingdom and throughout the world, as well as for those in the three fighting services. The college has enabled every fire-fighting establishment to provide its fire officers with a first-class training. As a result, the United Kingdom has, without doubt, the finest firefighting service in the world. It also has the finest fire officers in the world.

Those who have received training at Moreton-in-Marsh have taken the results of their training elsewhere. To my knowledge, the benefits of the training have been enjoyed at Bannyroyd at Huddersfield and at the fire station where I worked.

Against that background, the Minister is intent on making finance the predominant factor. He is wrong. A trading fund has to make a profit. The right hon. Gentleman talks about about outside people, but who has trained those people? They were trained by the fire officers at Moreton-in-Marsh, and then they went into industry. It

[Mr. Allen McKay]

seems that they will replace the training personnel at Moreton-in-Marsh. There are 470 applicants, but are there 470 vacancies?

Has the Minister talked to the Fire Brigades Union and the National Association of Fire Officers? We have not heard of any consultation of that sort, but the members of those organisations are at the sharp end. Those bodies provide the people who train at Moreton-in-Marsh and who enjoy the benefit of that training. We have heard nothing about the National Association of Fire Officers, or the Fire Brigades Union. Instead, we have had a financial statement.

The Minister has done a disservice to the fire service, the armed services and fire services throughout the world whose personnel have been trained at Moreton-in-Marsh. Those officers have shared their experiences and expertise.

For two years, the fire brigade of South Yorkshire has not been able to send any fire officers to Moreton-in-Marsh because of the current financial arrangements. If officers cannot be sent to the college now, how will it be possible to send them when we have a trading establishment? If the college is not making a profit now and it is not possible to send officers to it for training, how will it ever be possible to send them to an establishment that is obliged to make a profit? The standard spending assessment of the South Yorkshire authority does not help matters.

The rate capping of the fire service has meant a cut in fire services. They are now 83 personnel undermanned. The staff are using machines which have been used for far longer than they should have been, and they are now using equipment that should have been replaced. Worst of all, they do not have the services and have not been able to send fire officers for training. The lack of training will filter down throughout the establishment, and the fire service will deteriorate.

The Government took on responsibility for the fire services, and the culmination of their responsibility is the fact that they are doing away with training. For what? It is to provide training facilities for which private industry will pay, as the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) said, through the nose or over the odds.

What negotiations has the Minister had with the Fire Brigades Union, the fire officers association, and the establishment at Moreton-in-Marsh on what the effects will be? What will the order mean for the fire service establishment and what effect will the order have on the morale of the training service?

The Minister's actions mean deterioration purely and simply for money. The order is not the beginning of the privatisation of the fire service—there is a long way to go. Local authorities will be unable to train staff at Moreton-in-Marsh. The Government cannot bring themselves to close that centre, so they have had to consider a way of putting private money into it, by setting up the trading fund. The money is a loan. The loan must be paid back, but by whom? The Minister must answer that question. He will be proved wrong.

11.41 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay). Hon. Members heard him mention that he has had considerable experience in the fire service. His Yorkshire colleagues know very well that, in particular over the past few difficult years for the South Yorkshire fire service, my hon. Friend has given particularly signal and splendid service. I am glad to have this opportunity to pay tribute to my parliamentary neighbour, because he commands not only the respect of the House but the respect and affection of his Yorkshire colleagues, not least for his splendid work over the past two or three years in seeking to defend our area from the ravaging policies that the Government have inflicted upon it.

I was going to ask a series of questions, but they have all been asked. Therefore, I shall not detain the House for long, because the Minister has much to answer. It has already been made clear that we have the best fire service and the best fire training facilities in the world. The Minister looks very satisfied, but there is no cause for satisfaction in seeking to change that which is very good.

I have an example of the difference between the fire service of Britain and those of other so-called advanced countries. A few years ago, I saw in Europe—I shall not mention the area—a fire emergency. I timed it. It took 23 minutes for the appliance to go out. The Government Whip, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick),represents a Sheffield constituency for the time being. He will know that in our area——

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): The hon. Gentleman was a candidate and was truly thrashed.

Mr. Hardy: I brought the majority down by a figure sufficient to unseat the Member of Parliament at the next election. I do not want to involve myself in an exchange of that nature.

There are industrial establishments in our area where dangerous materials are placed. Just after the incident that I described in Europe, there was a dangerous fire in what was then my constituency. There was no difficulty at all, because the South Yorkshire fire service was in attendance at an astonishing speed, with all the equipment and skills that it needed to deal with the fire.

The fire was so dangerous that a national newspaper rang up and said, "Is it true that you have had a fire near these dangerous materials?" The fire service said yes. The newspaper said, "How many were killed?" The fire service said, "None." It said, "How many people were badly burned?" The fire service said, "None." So, of course, nothing appeared in the newspaper. The fact remains that no one was killed or hurt. That achievement was possible because of the training that the senior officers of that force had received at Moreton-in-Marsh. They will not now receive that training in sufficient numbers.

Last year the Government trod on dangerous ground when they denied an adequate standard spending assessment to South Yorkshire and placed the authority and those responsible for fire services in our area in real difficulty. The authority had anguished meetings at which it strove to work out how it could meet the standards that the financial arrangements prevented it from meeting.

There is another point. I shall finish on it to leave the Minister time to reply to the many questions that have been put to him. Not far from my home there is a toxic waste plant. Several hon. Members know that I have

raised the matter of the plant many times. I live not far from it. I do not live as close to it as some of my constituents, who have cause for daily anxiety.

A few months ago, there was a fire at the plant. It was during the latter part of the last recess, and I was in my garden. I immediately got into my car and drove to the plant. I was at the scene within two minutes. I wondered how long I would have to wait before the South Yorkshire fire service arrived. I live only a mile away, and was there within two minutes. The fire service followed me down the road. It came with not merely the fire appliance but the decontamination unit which has to be present if there is a fire at that establishment, where there is poisonous and dangerous carcinogenic waste.

I went to the plant knowing that officers in the force were trained to meet the ever more complex challenges which face the fire service. We should understand that, every day, new materials are invented which present mankind with new dangers and complexities. Every day there are new procedures and new anxieties. The Minister may smirk, but would anyone have expected the disaster at King's Cross? Would anyone have expected that carcinogenic chemicals would be deposited and left for three years at the site in my constituency?

If the fire service is not properly skilled to know how to deal with and respond to new materials and challenges, there is public risk. The fundamental obligation of any Government is to ensure public safety and public order. We know how much the Government have failed in public order. Their dangerous and dogmatic approach to this matter illustrates the clear and obvious fact that, no matter what words of support are received from the hon. Gentlemen behind the Minister, the fact remains that this step is a dangerous one. It is not in accordance with the advice of people in the provincial fire services. It is a dangerous step, which is being pursued purely because of the Government's attachment to private greed and public dogma.

11.43 pm

Mr. John Patten: With the leave of the House, I shall reply to the debate.

Among all the speeches made by Opposition Members, I listened with the greatest care to that made by the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay), who has signified his intention to lay down the burden of representing that constituency shortly. He spoke with the authority of someone who has served in the fire service. I respect him for that, and I listened carefully to what he had to say. I can assure him that nothing in the plans for the fire services college will lead to any diminution in training. Otherwise, the Government and Her Majesty's chief inspector of fire services would not have countenanced the changes that have been proposed. I found the hon. Gentleman's speech rational, but sometimes new developments come along which perhaps were not around when the hon. Gentleman was training to be a fireman.

The speech of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) was much less rational. I cannot understand what comes over the hon. Gentleman. In Committee he is a hard-hitting, well-briefed debater, but if one puts him near the Dispatch Box, something seems to happen. It happened yesterday, the day before and this evening. His colour changes, veins begin to throb and eyes begin to bulge. I understand that Walworth road has purchased a video, to be used for training purposes, of the explosion that the hon. Gentleman set off during the final stages of the bail statement. I regret that Dr. Jekyll upstairs is replaced by Mr. Hyde down here.

I repeat that the college has undertaken to meet all the demands of local authority fire brigades for training, before accepting applications from the commercial sector. That also answers the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy).

The hon. Members for Huddersfield and for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) mentioned consultation.

Mr. Lofthouse *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I must try to answer the debate in the few minutes that I have left.

I understand that the hon. Member for Makerfield has spoken on those issues at some length in Committee. On consultation, while at an earlier stage the hon. Gentleman is right that a number of the bodies concerned did not like the idea of moving to a trading fund, as the idea has been examined closely, they have been persuaded—so much so that the Association of County Councils, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the Fire Brigades Union and the National Association of Fire Officers and other fire interests were fully consulted about the trading fund proposal and not one raised an objection to the order being made.

The Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council for England and Wales was mentioned. It is correct that it opposed the introduction of direct charging, but once that was introduced in 1991-92, it raised no objections to the college becoming a trading fund, to give it greater flexibility, which it undoubtedly needs.

Mr. Sheerman: How much time did the Minister spend in Moreton-in-Marsh consulting and listening to views and when did he last go there?

Mr. Patten: My right hon. and noble Friend Earl Ferrers in the other place is ministerially responsible for the issues and has carried out consultations on the matters. He has made it clear that, if the AMA and other organisations wish to come to see him to discuss standards at any stage, they will be welcome.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield is gesticulating. You can see the temperature rising, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We can all see the signs coming. I invite him to get to his feet if he wants to intervene again in my speech. He made a serious mistake in attributing to Her Majesty's chief inspector of fire services the statement that he objected to the setting up of the trading fund. I have it on the highest authority that the chief inspector supported the move to agency status and to the trading fund.

Mr. Sheerman: I did not say that.

Mr. Patten: When the hon. Gentleman has a look at *Hansard* tomorrow, he will see that he attributed objections to the inspector of constabulary.

I shall give him the opportunity to intervene to make it quite clear that he does not attribute that to the inspector of fire services.

Mr. Sheerman: The Minister of State is misinterpreting what I said. I said that Her Majesty's inspector had a whole catalogue of concerns and worries about the current state of the fire service. He will check in *Hansard* and find that that is true. I am only sad that he and his colleague,

[Mr. Sheerman]

the Chairman of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), used my remarks to launch an attack on the fire service and on the police service—on their sickness record and their public holiday working period.

Mr. Patten: We shall look carefully at the record and listen to the tapes, and if *Hansard* records that which I believe the hon. Member for Huddersfield said, I hope that he will write to Her Majesty's inspector to withdraw his assertion, because it is a serious matter.

The demand for college places is already good. There are firm bookings for more than 18,000 student weeks in the 1992-93 course, and that augurs well for the success of the trading fund in the first year, despite what the hon. Member for Huddersfield said.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about Buckinghamshire. The Buckinghamshire fire authority has already booked 153 student weeks for 1992-93, which is a satisfactory level.

The chief executive post will be filled after open competition when it next becomes vacant. Home Office Ministers will naturally ensure that fire service needs are fully taken into account when determining levels of public expenditure. That is why there was a 16 per cent. increase this year and why there will be an 8·4 per cent. increase next year.

The order is a classic example of obtaining better value for money for the taxpayer and the community charge payer. A vote against it is a vote in favour of charging fire authorities higher prices for training. Those who vote against the order will lay extra burdens on local fire authorities. I commend this excellent and far-reaching measure to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 80, Noes 68.

Division No. 102] **[11.56 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Beggs, Roy
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Favell, Tony
Forman, Nigel
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayward, Robert
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lord, Michael
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Mans, Keith
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tim Boswell and
Mr. Irvine Patnick.

NOES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Benton, Joseph
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clelland, David
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Leadbitter, Ted
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McMaster, Gordon
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Morgan, Rhodri
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rooney, Terence
Sheerman, Barry
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Stott, Roger
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Allen McKay.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Fire Service College Trading Fund Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 11th February, be approved.

ESTIMATES

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 131 (Liaison Committee)

That this House agrees with the Report [24th February] of the Liaison Committee.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Michael Birkett

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

12.6 am

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): Let me first set the scene. I introduce on the one hand my constituent, Mr. Michael Birkett, and on the other hand that august body, the Law Society; and I invoke the lay observer as an impartial referee—more precisely, the 16th annual report of the lay observer 1990. Those are the main characters in the saga that I want to describe.

I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General for being here to reply. I am fully aware —and I stress this—that he cannot comment on Michael Birkett's specific case and his long-running dispute with the Law Society. I neither ask nor expect him to do so. I draw a specific case to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend and the House in a desire to promote a brief debate on the wider issues that emanate from it.

I raise the case for two further reasons. I hope that by so doing I will increase awareness outside the House of the particular injustice that my constituent suffered, and perhaps contribute to its resolution. I hope also that tonight's debate will play a part—albeit only a small part —in persuading the Law Society that it must put its own house in order. I contend that the society's failure to do so significantly contributes to the public's growing lack of confidence in the legal profession and in the process of justice. Those are undesirable trends, and they should be put right.

In 1974, Michael Birkett became involved in litigation. The solicitor acting for him was a certain Mr. Brian Fulwell of Fulwell and Partners, Bristol. Michael Birkett received from Mr. Fulwell a series of unwarranted demands for unwarranted sums of money. They were accompanied by threats not to represent Mr. Birkett at imminent, prearranged court proceedings. In indignation, my constituent complained to the Law Society. He was right to do so.

Even in 1974, the Law Society must have known—and most certainly should have known—that Fulwell and Partners was guilty of misconduct in its submission of interim bills. Eventually, the outcome of litigation entirely exonerated my constituent: each of his allegations was substantiated.

It is remarkable that the process of litigation should have lasted 12 years. During that time, and as a result of the drawn-out process of litigation, my constituent suffered—I use the legal phrase—loss, distress and humiliation. I strongly contend that none of it would have happened if the Law Society had properly investigated the allegations of misconduct, and properly adjudicated the consequences of its own shortcomings. I further contend that the Law Society should have mounted a proper and prompt investigation of the allegations.

Let me now turn to the subject of the Law Society, and refer specifically to the standards that it should set and should demand from solicitors. Addressing the Law Society's conference in October 1991, the president, Mr. Philip Ely, warned that the future of the solicitor's profession and its integrity were threatened, because the society protected the inefficient and dishonest solicitor—a noble and bold sentiment for him to express.

I invite my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General to consider a simple proposition. In the civil courts, it is the solicitor who provides the point of access for the citizen to the administration of justice and the process of law. It is, moreover, the quality of the service provided by the solicitor that largely determines that quality of justice that the citizen will subsequently receive. The solicitor has always been the most frequent advocate in the lower courts, and recently he has been given the right to a wider audience in higher courts. The solicitor is an officer of the court.

The integrity and competence of the court's officers are fundamental to the quality and reputation of justice. It is the statutory duty of the Law Society to set and maintain standards that are acceptable to the profession and the public. I have no doubt that a large majority of solicitors serve their clients and the courts with competence and integrity; however, the point that has rightly alarmed the Law Society is that a significant number of solicitors do not have acceptable standards.

Evidence is provided by the claims made on the compensation fund for losses resulting from the activities of dishonest and defaulting solicitors. They rose from £6·7 million in 1988 to £14·6 million in 1989, and to £18·3 million in 1990. The number of complaints to the Law Society about solicitors rose from 5,000 in 1977 to 9,000 in 1985, and to a record 18,000 in 1987. Since then, there have been more than 16,000 each year.

An inquiry in the late 1970s followed the highly publicised dispute between Mr. Leslie Parsons, a business man, and his solicitor, Mr. Glanville Davies, a senior member of the council of the Law Society. In due course, the inquiry reported:

> "We have found administrative failings, mistakes, wrong decisions, errors of judgement, failures in communication, high-handedness and insensitivity on a scale that must have done great harm to the Law Society. The whole episode is a disgrace to the Law Society."

There could scarcely be a more damning verdict.

In the past decade there have, of course, been successive improvements in the system for handling complaints against solicitors. In due course the Solicitors Complaints Bureau emerged, but it is not apparent that the Law Society has effected sufficient improvements in the overall standards of the profession. As I shall shortly argue, the society seeks to treat the symptoms but not the disease. Unless proper standards are enforced and while the society, either advertently or inadvertently, protects the dishonest and incompetent solicitor, there can only be further and increasing defaults among solicitors.

The remedy is not the one put forward by the president at the Law Society conference last October. Among other points, Mr. Philip Ely suggested that the profession should re-examine the practice of compensating for dishonesty, wherever and however caused. It is entirely unacceptable that the profession should ask for a reduction in the degree of protection afforded to those who use its services.

Next I turn to the lay observer's report. The 16th annual report of the lay observer, 1990, was, coincidentally, laid before the House a year ago today. It makes alarming reading. There are two themes that I wish to select. First, the report indicates that the professional standards of the Law Society itself remain unacceptably low. They appear not to have risen above the low tide mark that the society's own inquiry exposed in the Parsons-Davies case in the late 1970s. Secondly, it appears

[Mr. Andrew Hunter]

from the report that the society may already have embarked unofficially on the policy suggested by its president—namely, of reducing the amount of cover for the public through the statutory compensation fund. The case of my constituent, Michael Birkett, illustrates both points.

To expand, first, on the society's standards, paragraphs 63 to 75 comment on the Law Society's handling of my constituent's complaint. The society and the bureau took 16 years to complete their investigation. The lay observer rightly sees this as a matter of great concern and serious criticism. Paragraph 69 reads:

"In my report of August 1990 I expressed great concern and seriously criticised the Law Society/Bureau for the fact that it took 16 years to deal with BI's"—

the initials of my constituent—"complaints."

The society, on the other hand, does not see the delay as a matter for concern or regret. It has produced a series of excuses to justify its delay in investigating a solicitor who was eventually imprisoned for defrauding 26 other clients in the meantime. The Law Society might not have taken any action, even to this day, were it not for the prior action of a third party who forced the solicitor's insolvency.

An analysis of the detail of the report finds the society and/or the bureau culpable of no fewer than 24 instances of error, omission, perversity, prejudice and dereliction of duty. Among these was the loss or destruction of files containing the first eight years' correspondence and records. The society made no attempt to obtain copies of the missing letters from my constituent. To this day it has made no efforts to obtain copies. It proceeded to determine the complaint without them.

In his more detailed report of August 1990 the lay observer lists more than a dozen serious allegations of misconduct, none of which, he concluded, the Law Society ever properly considered. Is the society simply guilty of gross incompetence and disdain for duty, or could it be that it is trying to avoid financial consequences which would otherwise fall on its compensation and indemnity provisions? The society knows full well that proper consideration of Michael Birkett's complaint would result in another rightful and substantial claim on its funds.

That leads to the second point of my concern about the lay observer's report. The Law Society's reducing financial responsibility for dishonest and incompetent solicitors is a matter of concern. I stress that that is not the perception and experience of my constituent; the lay observer makes the same point. In paragraph 143 he records his concern that the society has imposed its own restrictions on access to the fund so as to deny clients some of the protection which the statutory funds should be providing.

The lay observer shares my constituent's belief that the Law Society is already operating an unofficial policy designed to reduce liability to meet in full the proper claims made on it for compensation.

The threat to the future of the solicitors' profession will not be countered by the president's proposition to the Law Society's conference last October. He said, as reported in *The Daily Telegraph* of 18 October last year, that it is

"time for the profession to examine afresh that it would pay for dishonesty wherever and however caused."

I appreciate that my right hon. and learned Friend cannot comment on the individual case of Michael Birkett. I invite him, however, to consider its wider implications, and from the particular to consider the general. As the lay observer reports, the case of Michael Birkett illustrates that all is not well with the administration of justice and the process of law. The erosion of public confidence parallels the erosion of the standards and the example set by the Law Society. I suggest that the two are related. The Law Society must put its own house in order, or it must be put into order, so that others do not experience what Michael Birkett has experienced.

12.22 am

The Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): I should like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) on having secured this Adjournment debate for the purpose of referring to this most disturbing case. My hon. Friend has spoken the more effectively for his refusal to spice his speech with adjectives, since he was dealing with an investigation of a solicitor's alleged misconduct that itself extended over 16 years. Since that was the case, his self-restraint was indeed deserving of reward. As I say, I think his speech was much the more effective by reason of it.

It is entirely right that he should have drawn attention, as he has done, in this context to the lay observer's 16th report. I agree entirely with what he has said about the great importance of the legal profession attracting, and deserving to attract, the confidence of the public. I will have something to say later about the privilege of self-regulation. My hon. Friend's speech was further tempered by realism in that he acknowledged—and I am grateful for it—that I cannot myself achieve redress for his constituent, Mr. Birkett.

The solicitors' profession is entirely independent and self-regulating. The professional practice, conduct and discipline of solicitors are regulated by statute, as are the rights to practise as a solicitor. Parliament therefore has an opportunity to discuss the statutory regulation of the Law Society whenever any changes are sought to the present arrangements.

The lay observer, to whom my hon. Friend has referred, was established by the Solicitors Act 1974 to examine allegations made by members of the public concerning the society's treatment of complaints about solicitors. Over the years that followed, it became apparent that the existence of that office by itself was not proving to be a sufficient spur to the profession to improve its procedures for dealing swiftly and effectively with alleged failures in professional competence. The Government's White Paper entitled, "Legal Services: A Framework for the Future", published in 1989, accordingly recommended that the lay observer should be replaced by a legal services ombudsman with increased powers.

One of the matters on which the Government expressed particular concern was the problem identified by the lay observer in his report on Mr. Birkett's case. In that case, he had criticised the policy of the professional purposes department, as it then was, of the Law Society and subsequently of the Solicitors Complaints Bureau, which was its successor, not to investigate complaints if there was litigation in prospect or in progress.

The Master of the Rolls indicated in 1987 that this policy could be unsatisfactory and produce unfair results.

He said:

"It is only if there is a risk that the investigation of misconduct will in some way muddy the waters of justice . . . that the Solicitors Complaints Bureau should, in my judgment, refrain from investigating a case for misconduct".

The bureau has since changed its policy. I understand that the practice now is, wherever possible, to investigate complaints straight away where the matters complained of are the subject of court proceedings, whatever the cause of the litigation, including allegations of negligence by a solicitor. The bureau's case workers were notified of this policy change. In addition, a complainant who has been informed that his case will not be investigated while associated litigation is pending may seek to have that decision reviewed. I will be interested to see if the ombudsman comments on the operation of the revised policy in his annual report. I recognise that, unfortunately, this change in policy has come too late to benefit Mr. Birkett.

The new statutory office of legal services ombudsman was subsequently created by the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990. The ombudsman is completely independent of Government and of the profession. It is a source of encouragement to all of us who share the interest of my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke that the first incumbent is a person for whose standing and experience the legal profession has such high regard.

The ombudsman has powers that go beyond those of the old lay observer. He is able to investigate not only the way in which complaints are handled by the relevant professional body but the original complaint. In addition, although the ombudsman would not normally examine a case until the profession's own complaints procedure had been exhausted, he has a discretion to investigate if it appears to him that the professional body's investigation process is being unreasonably delayed. When one considers that Mr. Birkett's original complaint was made in 1974 and the Law Society's final decision was given in 1990, one can see the value of this provision.

The ombudsman is able to refer a complaint back to the professional body with a recommendation that it look at it again. In addition, he has powers to recommend that either the practitioner or the professional body pay compensation to the client. This power is backed up by a publicity sanction under which, where a practitioner or a professional body refuses to comply with the ombudsman's recommendations, the ombudsman can either require them to make public their reasons for not doing so, or he can publicise their non-compliance and recover the costs for so doing from the individual practitioner or from the professional body. These increased powers—I remember debating them in the House nearly two years ago—represent a significant improvement in the way in which the ombudsman is able to investigate individual complaints, and to achieve redress for complainants. In addition, his remit has been extended to cover complaints against barristers and licensed conveyancers. In addition to 14 recommendations to the Solicitors Complaints Bureau that individual cases be reinvestigated, he has made 16 recommendations that compensation should be paid to complainants, for amounts ranging from £200 to £1,500. In one case, the complaints bureau has been required to pay compensation; in the other 15 cases, solicitors have been required to do so.

The ombudsman is uniquely placed to see where procedures may be operating unfairly and to the detriment of complainants. He is accordingly authorised to make general recommendations to the professional bodies about their complaints handling procedures, as well as to comment on procedures adopted in individual cases. The professional bodies are required by statute to have regard to any such recommendation. That is a significant improvement on what obtained before. I know that, since the White Paper on legal services, much has been done to improve the handling of complaints by the Solicitors Complaints Bureau and by the Law Society to improve and maintain the standard of care accorded to clients. I fear that Mr. Birkett's case vividly shows that there has been scope for that.

The Solicitors Complaints Bureau was set up in 1986 to replace the professional purposes department, which had previously handled complaints about the profession. This earlier arrangement had been criticised by many on the ground that it could not be shown to be sufficiently impartial. The complaints bureau was therefore set up to be independent of the Law Society—a major change—with a lay-dominated investigation committee to monitor its performance. The number of complaints received by the bureau is substantial. In 1990 there were nearly 18,000.

Over the past year, there have been significant changes in the way in which the bureau conducts its work. From 1 April last year, the bureau has been able to order a solicitor to compensate clients for work which is not of an adequate professional standard, up to a limit of £1,000, in addition to taking disciplinary action. In cases of negligence, where the complainant agrees, the bureau can also pass complaints of major negligence direct to the professional insurers, the solicitors indemnity fund. This will obviate the need for complainants in every case of negligence to take legal action. In some cases, particularly where the issue of negligence is disputed, this will still be unavoidable.

The bureau has shifted the emphasis of its work away from the investigation of disciplinary offences, which can be extremely time-consuming, towards conciliation. This informal approach aims to find a solution to the problem which is acceptable both to the client and to the solicitor, and the bureau now has a network of local conciliators who are used in simpler cases. In more complex cases, and where there remain outstanding issues of conduct or inadequate professional services, the bureau's staff will investigate the matter.

On the basis that prevention is better than cure, the Law Society has, from 1 May 1991, required all solicitors' firms to introduce new procedures for handling complaints in-house. In addition, solicitors are required to explain their procedures for handling cases at the outset of a case. The complaints bureau has also introduced a help line for clients rather than for solicitors, to assist complainants who are not certain whether they have a complaint or how to pursue it. I very much hope that these improvements in procedure will help to avoid the recurrence of cases such as Mr. Birkett's or of cases that even approach it.

In his report on Mr. Birkett's case, the lay observer said that it must be a matter of great concern and serious criticism that it took the professional purposes department —and the successor complaints bureau—16 years to reach a conclusion on Mr. Birkett's complaints. It may be enough for me to say tonight that I strongly endorse that opinion.

The Government have since established an entirely new framework, and the legal services ombudsman, with his new and much more effective powers, is now in place and

[The Attorney-General]

at work. It is for the professions themselves to ensure that procedures are devised and implemented which fully justify their privilege of self-regulation. That is a valuable privilege. However, if it is to continue, its existence must be seen to secure the interests not primarily of the profession and its members but of the public whom it is the true purpose of every profession to serve.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 27 February 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MERSEY DOCKS AND HARBOUR BILL *[Lords]*
(By Order)
Order for Third Reading read.
To be read the Third time on Thursday 5 March.

ALLIANCE AND LEICESTER (GIROBANK) BILL
(By Order)

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 4) BILL *(By Order)*

CROSSRAIL BILL *(By Order)*

EAST COAST MAIN LINE SAFETY BILL *(By Order)*

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (GREEN PARK) BILL
(By Order)

LONDON UNDERGROUND (JUBILEE) BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read the Second time on Thursday 5 March.

ABERDEEN HARBOUR ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL
Read the Third time, and passed.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Banbridge Hospital

1. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what guidance the management executive of the Department of Health and Social Services has recently given to the Southern health and social services board concerning the future of Banbridge hospital.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): None, Sir. The hon. Gentleman might be referring to the fact that on receipt of the Southern board's investment appraisal for the refurbishment of Banbridge hospital it became clear that there were a number of deficiencies in the document, as certain issues had not been properly addressed. The board has simply been asked to provide that information before I can make a decision.

Mr. Trimble: The Minister knows of the concern about the future of Banbridge hospital and knows that, for many years, the Southern board promised its refurbishment. That project was finally put into the proposals for this financial year, only to be clobbered by the moratorium on capital expenditure. As the Minister said, his Department wrote to the board in January to tell it that it should reconsider "the issue of Banbridge". It also supplied to the board a momorandum which has not been made available to other people. Is not the implication obvious? The hon. Gentleman is asking the board either to run down or to close the hospital. Is not that a consequence of the need to provide up to £15 million to cure the concrete cancer problem at Craigavon? What other hospitals will be affected? Why cannot that exceptional expense be met with exceptional funding?

Mr. Hanley: I am doing no such thing. The hon. Gentleman will know that any project in excess of £1 million must come to me for a decision. An investment appraisal comes with the project. The investment appraisal published by the Southern board was deficient in many respects. The board has a commitment to Banbridge hospital and to continuing health care and social services in its area. I merely want the information upon which I can decide whether refurbishment can go ahead. Therefore, there is no lack of commitment by the board or by me.

Security

2. **Sir Patrick Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

4. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a further statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Brooke): My last statement to the House followed the deaths of nine people on 4 and 5 February. Since then

there have been five deaths as a result of the security situation, including four men shot by the security forces near Coalisland on 16 February.

The Government and security forces will continue to meet their responsibility to bring terrorism to an end within the rule of law by pursuing a firm and resolute security policy and by working for progress in the political, economic and social fields.

Sir Patrick Duffy: Does the Secretary of State accept that the security forces must not only act within the law but always be clearly seen to act within it if they are to deprive the terrorist group of the environment in which it thrives? Will he therefore ensure that after any incident involving the use of lethal force there is a prompt, thorough and impartial investigation so that the facts are plain to see?

Mr. Brooke: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his statement and endorsement of the policy under which the security arrangements are conducted within the Province and for his reference to the rule of law. I assure him that after each such incident the Royal Ulster Constabulary investigates the circumstances.

Mr. Hunter: Will my right hon. Friend give serious consideration to the introduction of short-term selective internment? At a time of heightened terrorist activity, would not that undermine the operational effectiveness of the terrorists and play havoc with their planned acts of violence?

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend is right to point out that the powers of executive detention are on the statute book and are available for use. We do not comment further on them, beyond the fact that they are available for use.

Mr. Maginnis: Was not the Secretary of State a little disappointed at the reaction of some Church leaders to the successful contact by the security forces at Coalisland? Is not it important that the Northern Ireland Office should ensure that full information is available to the public on the extent of the deadly arsenal that the terrorists had with them on that occasion, which included AK47 assault rifles and Dsh heavy machine-guns?

Will the Secretary of State ensure that the public are aware that 12 dedicated terrorists were involved in that attack and, although no one glories in anyone's death, make it clear again that only four were shot? Does not that show that the security forces acted with remarkable restraint and that there is no dedicated shoot-to-kill policy?

Mr. Brooke: I support the hon. Gentleman's observations on the need for the circumstances of such cases to be made known. I do not think that there were any doubts in Northern Ireland about the circumstances of that case. The four men who were killed were sent on a murder mission. It is easy to assess their potential for action and their intent from their fire power, to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Does the Secretary of State recall a speech that he made several months ago in which he encouraged the business community to take on racketeers? Does he recall that he said that if the business community took the first step he and the police would give it whatever support and back-up it needed? Is he aware that one business man did as he suggested and, as a result of his coming forward, three people were convicted of racketeering? However, that business man was forced to close his business, change his name and go into hiding with his wife and two children, and he has received no financial support from the Northern Ireland Office. Despite the sympathy expressed by the judge in court, there is no way in which that business man can legally make a claim against the Northern Ireland Office. Will the Secretary of State ensure that his Department backs up his promises to the business community and ensure that such disincentives to the business community coming forward are not allowed to continue?

Mr. Brooke: I know that the hon. Gentleman supports our drive to deprive the paramilitaries on both sides of the sources of finance that sustain their campaigns. I recall the speech to which the hon. Gentleman referred and I know that he has referred before to a case similar to that which he described today. I confess that I thought that that case had arisen a little before that speech. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to write to me about the details of the case to which he referred I shall be happy to respond.

Mr. Mallon: When a Government have a serious problem that has lasted 22 years, cost billions of pounds in security and military provisions and caused immeasurable suffering to some people, it is reasonable to assume that they have a long-term policy for creating lasting peace and ending the waste. As we come to the end of this Parliament, will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to give us some insight into the Government's long-term policy which has been formulated during the past 13 years? I am not referring to ad hoc arrangements or short-term palliatives. Will the Secretary of State give an unambiguous statement of the Government's long-term policy for creating peace in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Brooke: As the hon. Gentleman implied by his question, the Government's central purpose must be to bring terrorism to an end. Terrorism will come to an end when the terrorist no longer believes that he has any chance of securing his objective by the means that he is using. That calls for a robust security policy to enable the people of Northern Ireland to live normal lives conducted within the rule of law. But it also implies, as my answer to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Sir P. Duffy) stated, Government policy in political, economic and social matters that deprives the terrorist of the support which he might otherwise have enjoyed.

Political Talks

3. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement about his recent efforts to have talks with representatives of political parties in Northern Ireland.

10. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a further statement on the efforts he is making to reconvene all-party talks on the future government of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: The Prime Minister, the Minister of State and I met the leaders of the four main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland on 11 February. As a result of that meeting, the leaders agreed to meet together to discuss

the obstacles in the way of further political dialogue in the hope that new talks might be able to begin at an early date. I shall meet them again shortly.

Mr. Canavan: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that if the killing is to be stopped and a just and peaceful solution is to be found, all politicians, whatever their views, have a responsibility to speak to each other? Does he further agree that, sooner or later, the talks will have to develop into meaningful discussions about constitutional change on an all-Ireland basis because the status quo is untenable and is a recipe for continuing conflict?

Mr. Brooke: I endorse what the hon. Gentleman says about the responsibility that politicians of all constitutional parties have, and a willingness so to talk has been very much present in recent years. As for his comments about all-Ireland talks, the talks on which we have been engaged, and to which we hope to return, contain more than one strand. The second strand involves the Government of the Republic and it has been a pleasure to all concerned that everybody involved in those talks has supported and sustained them.

Mr. Greenway: I take this opportunity to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for all the work that he has done in the past two and a half years to improve the future and administration of Northern Ireland. Does he agree that the future economic prosperity of the area depends primarily on the defeat of terrorism and that terrorism will not be defeated until all political parties in the Province renounce violence—not just those represented in the House today but Sinn Fein?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments about the policies that we have been pursuing and economic prosperity in the Province, where we have seen advances in recent years. Our immediate agenda must be the talks on which we embarked last year. Everybody concerned has expressed an interest in returning to them.

Mr. Molyneaux: Does the Secretary of State agree that the progress made thus far is more likely to be maintained through calm deliberation than high wire circus acts? Will he convey to the Prime Minister what I know to be the view of the three party leaders who represent Northern Ireland in the House—that we are endeavouring diligently to meet the wishes that he expressed at the Downing street meeting on 11 February?

Mr. Brooke: I endorse what the right hon. Gentleman said about the progress that has been made so far. All of us, during the time that we have been directly engaged in these matters, have found it easier to make progress when the media have not been looking over our shoulders and breathing on the backs of our necks. I mean no disrespect to the media, but some matters are carried forward more easily with the calm deliberation that the right hon. Gentleman described.

Mr. Kilfedder: I draw the attention of the Secretary of State to a damaging allegation made last week by the chairman of the Northern Ireland Conservative party and its prospective parliamentary candidate for North Down that the Secretary of State, by initiating talks between unionists and nationalists, provided the greatest possible encouragement for the murderous IRA campaign. Will the right hon. Gentleman bluntly refute the despicable accusation that those taking part in the talks are responsible for the deaths of innocent people at the hands of the IRA?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman knows well his opponent, the Conservative prospective parliamentary candidate. I enjoy my conversations with that gentleman as much as I do those that I have with right hon. and hon. Members.

Mr. Rees: As to strand 2—the north-south strand—of the talks to which the Secretary of State referred, the new Taoiseach announced that articles 2 and 3 would be on the table, and we all understand that. He said also that the Government of Ireland Act 1920 would be on the table. I studied it carefully this morning, better to understand what is involved. What has the Taoiseach said about that aspect that we can consider?

Mr. Brooke: Under the terms of my statement to the House of 26 March 1991, which set in motion the talks that we held, it is open to any party to raise any issues—including constitutional issues—that it considers relevant. However, the outcome of the talks will depend on securing agreement, and all concerned accept the principle that any change to Northern Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom would come about only with the consent of a majority of the people who live there.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is the Secretary of State confirming by that last statement that the union can be negotiated only by the House, the people of Northern Ireland and Her Majesty's Government—and that that matter is no concern of Mr. Reynolds or of the foreign state to the south of Northern Ireland? Is the right hon. Gentleman confirming that today? My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) and I understood that the basis of the talks was to try to secure a replacement for the Anglo-Irish Agreement and to make arrangements to safeguard the administration of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Brooke: At last night's meeting, the Taoiseach confirmed his Government's continuing commitment to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, article 1 of which contains a clear statement of Northern Ireland's constitutional status.

Mr. McNamara: Is the Secretary of State aware that the Opposition welcome the statements made by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach at last night's meeting, on the future progress of talks between the two Governments, and that Northern Ireland will be high on their agenda—as it will on the agenda of the Labour Government? We are pleased that Northern Ireland party leaders agreed to meet to discuss the possibilities of progress. Does the Secretary of State accept that the Opposition hope very much that, after years of violence and despair, a political settlement will emerge, and that we will do everything in our power to achieve such an outcome, based on the three strands agreement?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman and I have had similar exchanges before across the Dispatch Box, when he has advanced that bizarre and extraordinary hypothesis. I agree that the hon. Gentleman has supported the talks as they are conducted at present. If the hon. Gentleman's

extraordinary and bizarre hypothesis were to come to pass, I would—as I have said before—be supportive of his efforts.

Small Firms

5. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations he has received from the Northern Ireland business community in connection with small firms.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): Since the beginning of the year, I have continued both to meet and to correspond with a wide cross-section of the Northern Ireland business community. Among the issues that we have addressed have been a number of particular concern to small firms.

Mr. Bellingham: Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), I pay tribute to the Minister's work in supporting industry and business in the Province. Does he agree that one of the best ways of breaking down violence and lessening the sectarian divide is to encourage enterprise and initiative? Am I right in saying that Northern Ireland has weathered the recession better than any other part of the United Kingdom? If so, is not that due partly to the Government's support for small firms?

Mr. Needham: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind comments. The fact that Northern Ireland has weathered the recession better than any other region in the United Kingdom is due, to an extent, to the Government's policies; but it is due not least to the resourcefulness, intelligence and dedication of business people in Northern Ireland.

I was interested to learn this week that, whereas National Westminster bank—the parent of Ulster bank—had to make provision for £1·9 billion of bad debts, the figure for Northern Ireland was £6 million and that half the bank's profits came from Ulster bank. That shows beyond peradventure the current strength of the Northern Ireland economy. I am sure that, once the recession is over, it will continue to expand, and expand fast.

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: Is the Minister aware that the Department of the Environment has undertaken a surreptitious exercise in an attempt to destroy the private sector taxi service in Belfast? If so, can he tell us how much money has been allocated to that exercise?

Mr. Needham: I know of no surreptitious exercise being carried out by my Department in regard to private taxi firms in Belfast. The hon. Gentleman and I have engaged in lengthy discussions about the problems faced by Belfast taxi drivers and I fully appreciate their fears and concerns. I shall continue to discuss, with the hon. Gentleman and with the taxi drivers, whatever measures need to be taken to ensure their safety and continue their employment.

Mr. McGrady: In 1990-91, only 44 jobs were created in Northern Ireland. Will the Minister reconsider the wisdom of the policy change introduced a couple of years ago by the Local Enterprise Development Unit to endorse and support market research and development, rather than providing direct grant aid for job creation? That contradicted the philosophy, which proved correct, that small jobs—one or two-person start-ups—were the way in which to tackle, at least in part, the problem caused by the lack of inward investment.

Will the Minister address himself to LEDU's policy, and consider the reintroduction of direct aid for people starting up in business? I know that LEDU does a good job through its local enterprise development programmes, but will the hon. Gentleman consider returning to the previous policy?

Mr. Needham: I really do not know where the hon. Gentleman found the "44" figure. Perhaps he is referring to some figures that were leaked a couple of weeks ago from the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland—a reference to 44 inward investment jobs. That figure turned out to be wrong: at least another 350 jobs have already been announced, involving no financial assistance. I hope that, within the next few weeks, several hundred more jobs will be announced by the board.

That has nothing to do with LEDU. The key to the success of a small business lies in the skills and professionalism of its management, technicians and staff. LEDU is trying to ensure that small businesses have the marketing experience, the exporting know-how and the managerial capacity that they need in order to get going. The Government are not about to hand out dollops of money so that inexperienced people can buy complicated equipment that they then do not know how to use.

Rev. William McCrea: I am sure that the Minister realises that small business is the backbone of industry in my constituency of Mid-Ulster. Will he tell the House and my constituents what further incentives he can provide to ensure that small businesses are created and the economic blight is removed from my constituency?

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman pays rightful tribute to small business, describing it as the economic backbone of his constituency. I assure him that the Government's support for LEDU, and the money with which they provide it, continue year on year to match the needs of small business. I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that that will continue. I hope to be able to discuss it further with him in the not-too-distant future.

Internment

6. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received calling for the introduction of internment without trial; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The Government have received a number of representations calling for the reintroduction of executive detention. They have also received representations from those opposed to such a step.

The power to introduce executive detention remains on the statute book and is capable of being exercised by the Government. I shall not comment further, except to say that the consequences of such a step would need to be very carefully weighed.

Mr. Flannery: Does the Secretary of State agree that the re-imposition of internment without trial would deepen and intensify an already terribly difficult situation? Does he recall that last time this occurred there was an immediate leap forward in terms of killing? We would face that again. Those who are asking for that—many voices,

including important voices, in Northern Ireland are asking for it—would create a situation for everybody in Northern Ireland that would be far worse than it is now and, God knows, it is bad enough at present.

Mr. Brooke: The fact that the Government retained executive detention on the statute book by a free act last year is an indication that the Government believe it to be important that the instrument should be available. The hon. Gentleman referred to the last time it occurred. There are occasions—perhaps the only occasions when I feel a mild sense of despair in dealing with the affairs of Northern Ireland—when I fear that others assume that all events in Irish history will always repeat themselves exactly. That is not the case—and it is because it is not the case that we are making progress in the way that we are.

Sir John Farr: Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that he will discard no weapon at all in the fight against terrorism—including internment, if necessary? Should it unfortunately prove necessary, will my right hon. Friend make arrangements for it possibly to be introduced without notice and simultaneously after consultation with the Government of the Republic of Ireland?

Mr. Brooke: By definition, the weapon has not been discarded, as it will remain on the statute book, with the renewal of the order, in terms of the life of the statute. Clearly and patently, if it were to be introduced, it would be introduced without notice. There have been commentators who have said that if it were introduced, it would be much more effective if it were introduced throughout the island.

Mr. McNamara: Has the Secretary of State discussed the matter with the Government of the Republic of Ireland? Does he accept that internment would be the height of folly and would have no support at all from the Labour party? Will he also point out to those advocating such a foolish policy that they are merely diverting attention from the villainous crimes of the terrorists and, perhaps more importantly, from the enormous successes of the security forces and thus undermining confidence in the rule of law? The right hon. Gentleman has pointed out in the House that nearly 50 per cent. of people convicted of terrorist offences had no previous intelligence tracings in terms of involvement with terrorist organisations. Does he agree that always the best thing to do is to arrest, produce evidence, convict and put terrorists behind bars?

Mr. Brooke: The only matters that I discuss with Irish Ministers in intergovernmental conferences under the Anglo-Irish Agreement are those which can be discussed under the rules of the agreement. It would be a mistake, however, to think that we do not cover extensively all the ground and territory that is available within those limits. As to the rest of the hon. Gentleman's question, I said at the beginning that I thought the less said the better.

Castle Court

7. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assistance was given by his Department to traders whose businesses were disrupted by the Castle Court development in Belfast.

Mr. Needham: Following representations from local traders about the disruption to their businesses, rates on properties in the surrounding streets were reduced by up to one third. Belfast city council reduced rents in Smithfield market by a similar proportion.

Mr. Barnes: Glowing remarks were made earlier about small businesses in Northern Ireland. I know that the Minister has met Mr. Thomas Lennon, whose business was seriously disrupted during the Castle Court development, as were the businesses of other small business men in the area. A rates reduction for a certain period is inadequate to compensate for the great disruption that was caused to people seeking to make a living in that area—people who do not have the wherewithal or the ability to use the court system against the Minister. Why does he not face up to his responsibility and see that adequate compensation is given to the people who suffered so badly during that development?

Mr. Needham: Mr. Lennon's rates were reduced by a third. The best news that Mr. Lennon can have is that the Castle Court complex now employs some 2,500 people. It has brought into that area of Belfast a vast number of new businesses and has revitalised that area of the town. The traders who trade around it can do nothing but benefit from the new multi-storey car park with 1,600 spaces. The best thing that could happen for Mr. Lennon and his friends would be if the military wing of Sinn Fein stopped trying to blow up Belfast.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Despite the major differences between the Conservative party and the Ulster Unionist party following the imposition by the Conservative party of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and partial Dublin rule through Stormont, will the Minister accept on a personal level that there is widespread respect throughout Northern Ireland for the contribution that he has made to the rejuvenation of Royal avenue in our capital city of Belfast? Does he recognise that it is one of the commercial miracles of Northern Ireland and is now envied by many areas in the United Kingdom? Should he not be with us in six weeks, will he leave a message for his successor to ensure the continuation of that economic miracle into York street and York road in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker)?

Mr. Needham: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his kind words. It will not stop at Belfast. It is spreading to Derry, Newry, Armagh, Carrickfergus and Ballymoney, and throughout the length and breadth of Northern Ireland. The people, the councillors and the business community of Northern Ireland are coming together to create their own economic future and to undermine the men of violence on either side. They know that their success will lead to the defeat of the paramilitaries. The people of Northern Ireland continue to need to be congratulated on their determination and resilience.

Hospital Waiting Lists

8. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what initiatives are being taken to reduce hospital waiting lists in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: From 1 April this year, the vast majority of patients will be guaranteed admission to hospital within two years of being placed on a hospital waiting list. Special task forces have been at work in each board to deal with

the longest waiting lists and I have set aside an extra £1 million this year and in each of the next two years to support their work.

Mr. Stevens: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply, which I am sure will be welcome to the people of Northern Ireland. I hope that there will be the same success in cutting waiting lists in Northern Ireland as we have seen in other parts of the United Kingdom. I know that my hon. Friend is aware that the waiting list for treatment of coronary disease has been a matter of concern in Northern Ireland. What action has he taken to deal with that specific waiting list?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend is right. Unfortunately, Northern Ireland suffers from one of the worst rates of coronary heart disease. Following completion of the £1·5 million extension to the cardiac care recovery unit at the Royal Victoria hospital at the end of last year, a fourth cardiac surgeon has now been appointed there. The new surgeon, a locum, will take up his post on 1 May this year for an initial period of one year. That will lead to an increase in the number of operations at the Royal. In addition, the Eastern and Western boards have already begun to buy in cardiac operations from Great Britain this year and the Northern and Southern boards are expected to do likewise shortly. I hope that the waiting list for cardiac surgery will reduce greatly over the next year.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Minister accept that patients, irrespective of age group, should not have to undergo prolonged suffering, being fobbed off with medication from time to time when cardiac surgery is necessary? Will he urgently encourage all boards to purchase coronary artery bypass surgery and other cardiac surgery from Great Britain?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right and I agree with every word he says. Cardiac surgery has the longest waiting list in Northern Ireland, but every effort is being made to reduce it, including the purchase of operations in Britain. I believe that great progress will be made.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: In considering hospital waiting lists, is my hon. Friend satisfied that all those who would benefit from renal replacement therapy are getting it and has he anything to announce about a possible new satellite dialysis unit for the Province?

Mr. Hanley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. I am afraid that he is right: not everybody is benefiting from kidney replacement, because there is a shortage of kidney donors. We could probably carry out about 70 more operations a year if there were more donors. I therefore launched the donor card again last week. I hope that every hon. Member, and everyone in Northern Ireland, will carry a donor card; it is vital that people do so.

Hospital Trusts

11. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment has been made of the adverse effect on maintaining and upgrading hospitals, of the amount being spent in preparing hospital trusts.

Mr. Hanley: It has always been made clear that the Government's reforms are not to be introduced at the expense of patient and client care. Additional funds have been made available for the purpose and, accordingly, the reforms—including the establishment of trusts—cause no adverse effects on the hospital maintenance programme.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The Minister's comments may be helpful in the House, but they will not allay the concern that has been expressed throughout Northern Ireland—for example, in Upper Bann—about the amount of money that is needed to deal with the problem of concrete cancer at Craigavon hospital. Will he acknowledge that even those who are trying to implement hospital trusts are concerned that the dead hand of bureaucracy, which has increased, is hindering their work?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman makes a serious point about concrete cancer and money will have to be found to deal with that in due course. I assure him that the money spent on the health reforms will lead to greater efficiencies and savings—its purpose is to improve patient care and to increase the number of patients treated—and it is extra to the maintenance programme. I am pleased to say that, as from yesterday, 11 new hospital and social service organisation units applied for hospital trust status in Northern Ireland. They recognise the advantages that will flow from trust status.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend confirm that NHS trust hospitals are treating many more patients than a year ago? Is it not perverse, therefore, that some people are suggesting that those hospital trusts should be wound up?

Mr. Hanley: I thoroughly agree that hospital trusts are proving their worth, but the national health service in Northern Ireland is succeeding with trusts even before they have been established. The establishment of trusts will improve matters. The total number of in-patients in Northern Ireland, including day cases, increased by 9 per cent. last year. The total number of operations increased by 15 per cent. and the total number of new out-patients by 6 per cent. With or without trusts, Northern Ireland is succeeding in health care. Trusts will make that even better.

Roads Maintenance

12. **Mr. Clifford Forsythe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to increase the funds allocated to roads maintenance in the next financial year.

Mr. Needham: It is planned to increase funding for the operation and maintenance of roads, and associated bridges, in the 1992-93 financial year by £3·2 million to £65·3 million.

Mr. Forsythe: Does the Northern Ireland Office keep a record of unadopted roads not covered by bonds? What progress has been made in bringing those roads up to condition?

Mr. Needham: I think that the hon. Gentleman's colleague, the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) came to see me about one of the cases to which he refers. All I can say is that the giving up of bonds on unadopted roads is not a matter with which I deal daily,

but I shall certainly consider the cases that the hon. Gentleman brings to my attention and see what can be done.

Mr. Hume: Is the Minister aware that when the Unionist party governed Northern Ireland it concentrated heavily on developing the roads only in the eastern part of Northern Ireland? It did an outstanding job there, but the state of roads in the western part where there are areas of high unemployment such as Derry, Tyrone and Fermanagh—as exemplified by the Derry to Strabane road—are still in need of urgent development. Will the Department give priority to the development of those roads in future planning?

Mr. Needham: I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman's point. I assure him that the highest priority will be given to developing those roads, within the budget by which we are currently constrained.

Security

13. **Mr. Molyneaux:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Sir P. Duffy).

Mr. Molyneaux: In view of the statement made by the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary that terrorist movements can be destroyed very effectively from within, will the Secretary of State consult his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to ensure that the full weight of the intelligence services is brought to bear on all terrorist movements within the United Kingdom?

Mr. Brooke: In explaining that my hon. Friend the Minister of State is not present to answer questions because he is doing duty in the Province, I give the right hon. Gentleman an absolute assurance of the commitment of the intelligence services and of their relevance in Northern Ireland today.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Loyden: Will the Prime Minister come out of his ivory tower across the road, put his photo calls on hold and face up to his responsibility for the past 13 years of Government mismanagement, which has culminated in the worst economic crisis since the 1930s? How long must we go on, how many more jobs are to be lost and how many more families are to be dispossessed of their homes? Will the Prime Minister now put it to the test through the ballot box and let the people decide on his record?

The Prime Minister: It is the hon. Member who is wrong. We grew throughout the 1980s better than any other major European country except Spain: we received the highest growth in manufacturing productivity of any Group of Seven country and faster growth in business investment than any other G7 country except Japan. By contrast, the hon. Gentleman might bear it in mind that Labour's plans for an extra £37 billion a year and policies of higher taxation, higher inflation and higher interest rates would drive this country into perpetual slump.

Q2. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Devlin: Does my right hon. Friend agree that higher taxes and minimum wages would put up the costs of British businesses, making them uncompetitive and costing them jobs? Does he agree that such twin torture is the very last thing that British business needs at the moment?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Only the Labour party could plan to cripple industry with both a national minimum wage and substantial tax increases when trading conditions are so difficult. Let me give my hon. Friend a quote:

> "If our costs rise more rapidly than others' costs, particularly German costs, then British producers lose markets at home and abroad."

Those are not my words—they were the words of the Leader of the Opposition. If that is what he thinks, he should withdraw his tax plans and withdraw his minimum wage plans and do so today.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister recall saying that a

> "promise . . . to cut taxes AND increase public expenditure . . . is dishonest and absurd"?

When the right hon. Gentleman wrote that, did he think that he would end up making exactly that "dishonest and absurd" promise himself?

The Prime Minister: It is quite staggering to everyone who listens to the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) how terrified he and his party are of tax cuts. He still thinks that tax cuts are immoral. The Labour party has opposed every tax cut that we have introduced and now it threatens to raise taxes if we cut them. The right hon. Gentleman wants people to let him spend their money rather than spending it themselves. Labour opposes tax cuts when the economy is growing and when it is not.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister heads the Government who have imposed the biggest tax burden in British history. Perhaps he will now try answering the question. The Government have promised to increase public expenditure and are promising to cut income taxes. Is that not, in the Prime Minister's own words, truly a "dishonest and absurd" promise?

The Prime Minister: If the tax burden is so high, why does the right hon. Gentleman propose to increase it still further? When it was pointed out to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) that his taxes would rise, the right hon. and learned Gentleman seemed surprised: what the right hon. and learned Gentleman said, in effect, was that taxes under Labour

would "only" rise higher than those in any other G7 country—lower, perhaps, than taxes in Albania, but higher than those of all our competitors.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister, in the last couple of weeks left to him in that office, try answering the question? Does he not recall that he has promised to increase public expenditure, to cut taxes and to balance the budget? His promises do not add up. He was right—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister has made all those promises. He was right: those promises are dishonest—*[Interruption.]* I am quoting the Prime Minister, and he will hear this again—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us have an end to this pointing across the Chamber.

Mr. Kinnock: Even deliberate disruption will not stop the country hearing this. The Prime Minister has described promises to cut taxes and raise public expenditure as "dishonest and absurd". He was at least right about that —and right about the Government who are making such promises.

The Prime Minister: In the 1980s we did cut taxation and raise public expenditure. The right hon. Gentleman makes an absurd point. Under the Labour Government, borrowing averaged more than 6 per cent. of national product; since 1979, it has averaged not 6 per cent. but less than 2 per cent. Before the right hon. Gentleman starts to give lectures on borrowing, he should get his facts right. In one year under Labour, borrowing reached a crippling 9½ per cent.—the equivalent of £55 billion today. That was the Labour party's half decade of debt and now they plan another £37 billion worth of expenditure. Which would it be: £37 billion of extra taxes or £37 billion of extra expenditure?

Q3. **Mr. Hill:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hill: On the eve of the first anniversary of the Gulf war, will my right hon. Friend join me in expressing our gratitude to our armed forces, our commitment to the independence of Kuwait and our determination to ensure that Saddam Hussein and his generals comply with all international sanctions or suffer the consequences?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is quite right. The whole country is proud of the role that our armed forces played in the liberation of Kuwait. The way in which Saddam Hussein still behaves is unacceptable to us, to the United Nations and to the international community, and we shall continue to keep pressure on him.

Mr. Ashley: Is the Prime Minister aware that something far more valuable than the woolly citizens charter was brought before this House recently—a Bill to improve the rights of disabled people—but was talked out by Conservative Members? Will he now undertake to rescue the Bill? Or is this yet another example of the Government and their supporters talking up human rights in theory and knocking them down in practice?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has done a great deal during his period in the House for disabled people and everyone in the House admires him for what he has done, but he must know that there have been dramatic improvements in recent years in the scope, range and value of benefits and in the number of disabled people who receive them. No doubt there is still more to do, and it will be done in due course, but the right hon. Gentleman ought not to deny what has been done.

Q4. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bellingham: Does the Prime Minister recognise that, because of privatisation, the water companies are spending £28 billion on improving water quality, including schemes in west Norfolk to upgrade drinking water and clean up our beaches? Is he aware that renationalising water would cost the taxpayer £8 billion and that the whole of this investment programme would be put at risk? Is that really what the Labour party wants?

The Prime Minister: I suspect that it is. My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Yesterday, Labour's spokesman made the point that nationalising water was a priority—yet another priority—which would cost £8 billion. There was no sign of where the money will come from, and no sign of any advantage from the policy—just sheer blind dogma.

Mr. Ashdown: With British industry burdened by record debt and Britain's trade deficit at its highest for a year, will the Prime Minister explain why tax cuts which will suck in more imports are right while public investment in the kind of things that Britain needs for the future is wrong?

The Prime Minister: There was a time in the history of the Liberal party when it trusted people with their own money and believed that they could make their own decisions. I note that, yet again, the Liberal party is aligning itself with the Labour party on social and taxation matters. The whole country will note that, too.

Mr. Kilfedder: I am sure that the Prime Minister will join me in expressing the utmost admiration for the Australian people and the great commonwealth of Australia. Will he therefore do his best to defuse the present unhappy situation and assure the people of that great continent that, although they may be on the other side of the world, they are close to the hearts of the people of the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: I will certainly undertake to do that. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend on that matter.

Wallsend

Q5. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will visit Wallsend.

The Prime Minister: I am making plans for a series of visits to all parts of the country and hope to return to the north-east in the midst of those plans.

Mr. Garrett: I would like the Prime Minister to visit Wallsend because he visited the neighbouring

Conservative-held constituency and saw the destruction arising from the Meadowell riots as a result of 13 years of Thatcherism. The Prime Minister would be most welcome to visit the Wallsend part of North Tyneside where he would have an opportunity to visit Swan Hunter and see a dedicated work force, a dedicated management and, above all, the pride of the people in Wallsend in building and refitting ships for the Royal Navy. He would also learn about a series of problems, the main one of which is the unfair subsidies to ship building companies in the European Community which are handicapping the British ship building industry in terms of merchant shipping orders.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point and I have considerable sympathy with what he says about that. The Government's plans for the future naval fleet, including those recently announced for amphibious forces, will provide excellent opportunities for Swan Hunter to bid to obtain more orders. On the subject of equitability across Europe, our aim is to establish that and competitive conditions for all United Kingdom ship builders as soon as possible at national and international levels. We shall certainly keep up the pressure to achieve that, in the interests of Swan Hunter and many other fine firms in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: On his way to Wallsend, will my right hon. Friend visit the north-west of the United Kingdom, and the borough of Macclesfield in particular? If he does, he will find an area ready to respond to the sound foundations of the economy that he and the Government have established.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his very warm support. I had the opportunity to visit the north-west on Monday, where I found a good deal of buoyancy and confidence in the future of the north-west and of the country as a whole.

Engagements

Q7. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 27 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Prime Minister not have a guilty conscience about his role as an ex-social security Minister? Does he remember the period after 1985 when he came to the Dispatch Box and abolished the death grant and took away maternity grant and income support for 16 and 17-year-olds, while all the time pensioners were losing £14 a week? What is all this claptrap about a classless society and a citizens charter? The pensioners need more than that —and not that load of hypocrisy from the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman wants to know about claptrap, he should listen to what he has just said. If he examines the record, he will see that for people in need I dramatically increased the amounts available for the death grant.

Business of the House

3.32 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House please give us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 2 MARCH—Until seven o'clock, motion to take note of EC documents relating to asylum and immigration. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Debate on the report from the Select Committee on Sittings of the House on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Motion on the Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure.

TUESDAY 3 MARCH—Remaining stages of the Further and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]*.

Proceedings on the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Bill *[Lords]*, which is a consolidation measure.

Motion on the Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order.

WEDNESDAY 4 MARCH—Supplemental timetable motion on and consideration of Lords amendments to the Local Government Finance Bill.

Completion of remaining stages of the Transport and Works Bill.

Remaining stages of the Offshore Safety Bill *[Lords]* and the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Bill *[Lords]*.

Motion on the Social Security (Disability Living Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations.

THURSDAY 5 MARCH—Estimates day (2nd Allotted Day, 1st Part). There will be a debate on Yugoslavia. Details of the estimate concerned and the relevant Select Committee Report will be given in the *Official Report*.

Debate on Northern Ireland affairs on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

At ten o'clock the Question will be put on all outstanding supplementary estimates and votes.

FRIDAY 6 MARCH—Private Members' motions.

MONDAY 9 MARCH—Second Reading of the Friendly Societies Bill.

Debate on the report of the Accommodation and Works Committee in respect of phase 2 parliamentary building.

The Chairman of Ways and Means is expected to name opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee 'A' will meet at 10.30 am on Wednesday 4 March to consider European Community document No. 8910/91, relating to common organisation of the market in the sugar and isoglucose sector.

[Monday 2 March, Floor of the House
Relevant European Community Documents
(a) 8810/91 Right of Asylum
(b) 8811/91 Immigration
Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
(a) HC 24-x (1991-92)
(b) HC 24-x (1991-92)

Wednesday 4 March, European Standing Committee A
Relevant European Community Document
8910/91 Sugar and Isoglucose Sector (Court of Auditors Special Report No 4/91)
Relevant Report of the European Legislation Committee
HC 24-vii (1991-92)

Thursday 5 March, Estimates Day (2nd Allotted Day, 1st Part), class II, vote 2, Foreign and Commonwealth Office: other external relations, in so far as it relates to Yugoslavia.
Relevant report: First report from the Foreign Affairs Committee, Session 1991-92 (HC 21): "Central and Eastern Europe: Problems of the Post-Communist Era"].

Dr. Cunningham: On the business for Monday—the sittings and conduct of business in the House—will the Leader of the House take time to explain why he has apparently advised the Commissioner of Customs and Excise not to answer questions when giving evidence before the Select Committee on Trade and Industry in the inquiry into the supergun affair? Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will confirm whether that is indeed the case, as that gentleman said. What has the Customs and Excise to hide in that inquiry? Is it not rather odd for the Leader of the House himself apparently to be undermining the work of Select Committees of the House? May we have an explanation of those events, please?

May we express disappointment that the Leader of the House has not provided either a Government Supply day next week or an Opposition Supply day to debate Britain's abysmal trade performance? He must surely be aware of the appalling deficit of almost £800 million in January, with Britain's trade in the depths of the longest recession for more than 50 years. Does that not demonstrate beyond doubt the depths to which the Government's economic mismanagement has brought the British economy? Should we not have an opportunity to debate that next week?

I thank the Leader of the House for acceding to our requests to have next week's guillotined debate at a more appropriate time—on Wednesday in prime time—than the time that he originally intended? Will he ensure that the Secretary of State for the Environment, his right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), comes to the House, and that when he talks about what he described as the "Tory tax"—the poll tax—he explains why this year average poll tax bills will be about £50 more than the Secretary of State for the Environment suggested that they would be—and why people are still paying an extra 2·5 per cent. VAT on their expenditure subject to that tax? May we have an explanation of those matters from the Secretary of State for the Environment next week?

Last week I asked the Leader of the House to give us a guarantee that the House would have the normal time to debate the Budget when it is introduced on 10 March. Will he assure us that the Budget debate will not be cut short and guillotined because of the Government's 9 April general election programme? May we have that assurance —yes or no?

Mr. MacGregor: I am happy to deal with the first point now, because the hon. Gentleman has got it all wrong. It would have been very helpful if the hon. Gentleman had checked his facts. I must say that I am very dubious about many of his charges, given how wrong he is on that one.

The Customs and Excise official asked my office for guidance as to what the Government's response was to the Select Committee on Procedure recommendations in relation to prosecution authorities' answers in front of Select Committees. My office referred him to an official who gave him the information, which is publicly available, about the Government's response to the Procedure Committee's remarks. That is all that happened. The hon. Gentleman made an absolute meal out of it and got it totally and completely wrong. It makes one wonder about the other charges that he makes.

As for the point about the trade figures, of course it will be possible to discuss the economic situation, yet again, soon. We shall be happy to do so. The hon. Gentleman will know that the figures for the past three months show that the balance of payments deficit is broadly in line with the quarterly average for last year, and that the underlying trade performance is good and improving. Export volumes in the past three months were up 3·5 per cent. on a year earlier, despite the slowdown in world trade. Manufactured export volumes are also up by 3·5 per cent. over that period and exports to the European Community are 4 per cent. higher. On the same basis, total imports are up just 1 per cent. So we would be happy to debate that matter.

As for the hon. Gentleman's third request, as he knows, I always try to arrange business as much as possible in ways that are suitable to both sides of the House. He made a point about the community charge. Once again, the Opposition are peddling figures which have no basis in fact. The real figures for community charge increases this year will include an element for those who did not pay their community charge. And who encouraged many people not to pay? It was Opposition Members and many Labour councillors around the country.

On the hon. Gentleman's final point, Mr. Speaker, you urged me and others to concentrate on the business for next week. As the hon. Gentleman knows, his final point was not about next week's business. But I shall be happy to deal with it in next week's business statement.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I refer again to what the Leader of the House just said. Let us deal with next week's business, please.

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week for a debate or, failing that, a statement on the problem of itinerants, new age travellers and gipsies? Can we have some action?

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware of my hon. Friend's concern and that of many of my hon. Friends about that matter, and I share it. I know that my hon. Friend took the opportunity of raising the matter in the House on 12 December on the Adjournment. I am also aware that he recently met my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning to consider the matter. The Government are certainly aware that there are difficulties with the operation of the provisions of the Caravan Sites Act 1968. A review is under consideration. I assure my hon. Friend that that work is proceeding with all due pace. However, I am not sure whether we shall be able to make a statement next week.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): As a former Fisheries Minister, the Leader of the House will know that for some time many of us have pressed the case for a decommissioning scheme to be introduced by the Government. Can he confirm reports that an announcement to that effect is imminent? Will the relevant Minister come to the House next week to make that statement?

Could the Leader of the House also secure the attendance of a Minister to respond to early-day motion 129?

[That this House recalls the special arrangements made by the Government to increase benefits to pre-1973 war widows; notes that beneficiaries of the armed forces pension scheme who were invalided from the service prior to 1973 do not benefit from the improvement made to that scheme introduced in 1973 in the same way that pre-1973 war widows did not benefit until recently; and therefore calls upon the Government to take immediate action to remedy this situation and upgrade armed forces pensions payments to those former servicemen who left the services prior to 1973, particularly those who were invalided from the services and suffered disability in the service of their country.]

The motion calls for equality of treatment in terms of pension for those invalided out of the armed services before and after 1973. In recent months the Government have shown common sense in relation to compensation for haemophiliacs who contracted HIV. Previously they did so for war widows widowed before and after 1973, allowing proper treatment for them. Surely those who suffered disability in the service of their country deserve equal treatment too.

Mr. MacGregor: On the second point, as the hon. Gentleman rightly recognised, the Government introduced special payments for pre-1973 war widows in recognition of the view widely held in Parliament and in Britain at large that they were a unique group for whom exceptional treatment was appropriate. The position on pre-1973 war disability pensioners is somewhat different, and it is not considered that similar special action is justified.

On the first point, as the hon. Gentleman probably knows, the Government are considering the conservation issues which are raised as a result of various discussions in the European Community. I am not yet in a position to say when conclusions will be reached. When they are reached, I shall certainly consider how that might be made known to the House.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): May I thank the Leader of the House for receiving my colleagues the leader of the Social Democratic and Labour party, the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), and the leader of the Ulster Unionists, the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), and for listening carefully to the representations made to him that there should be a debate in the House on the affairs of Northern Ireland following the Downing street meeting that we had with the Prime Minister? May I thank him on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland for giving time on Thursday for that important debate?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and to hon. Members opposite for raising that matter with me. It is an important debate. He is right to say that it follows the Downing street talks with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I am pleased that further initiatives have followed those talks. I considered it right to respond immediately to their request for a debate. I wish that I

[Mr. MacGregor]

could have given longer, but there is a lot of pressure on the House next week. I thought it right to respond to that request for an immediate debate, and I am glad to have been able to do so.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): I join the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) in expressing our appreciation to the Leader of the House for the speed with which he responded to the joint request by the three leaders in Northern Ireland, as that will be the first time in the life of this Parliament that a major debate on the situation in Northern Ireland will take place. May I express the hope that all parties will show their concern for the fact that that is the major human problem facing this Parliament by being present and taking part in the debate?

Mr. MacGregor: I thank the hon. Gentleman. As he knows, we give a great deal of time to Northern Ireland issues in the House, and have done so in recent weeks, but this debate is rather different and very special. It follows the initiatives that have been taken recently in the light of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's discussions at Downing street with the hon. Gentleman and others. It is an important debate and I am sure that as many people as possible will wish to be here. However, the hon. Gentleman will recognise that the debate will be at a time when many hon. Members will expect to be back in their constituencies. However, I agree with him and I am glad that we have been able to find time for that important and wide-ranging debate.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Would the Leader of the House consider an urgent request from me to try to rearrange business next week to give us the chance to debate education philosophy, given that the Opposition wish to pass a sentence of death on the grammar school, the high school and the city technology college in my constituency? If they had their way, we would end up with an education philosophy which would give only the rich a choice in education.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree entirely. I should have liked to find time next week, and I hope that we shall find time not long afterwards. My hon. Friend is right to say that that is the Opposition's single distinctive contribution on education. I cannot think of anything more deleterious to increasing opportunities, the range of choice, and so on. They would abolish all the opportunities for greater variety and improvement of standards which have been introduced through city technology colleges, the assisted places scheme and grant-maintained schools, and they would abolish existing grammar schools. My hon. Friend is right that that means that opportunities for people from lower income households to take advantage of that range of choice would disappear.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): Will the Leader of the House find out whether the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry noticed the statement last week by Alan Nightingale, chairman of the Apparel, Knitting and Textile Alliance, drawing attention to a large number of methods that other countries are using either to prevent our textiles getting into their countries or to aid theirs getting into our country? Will he also find out whether the Secretary of State would like to make a statement about that to try to save some of the many thousands of jobs which are in danger? He might even let us know what is happening with the GATT talks.

Mr. MacGregor: As the House knows, the Government are keen to see a conclusion to the GATT talks for reasons that we have often debated. So far as the textile industry is concerned in that respect, for the time being, as the hon. Gentleman knows, pending a final outcome of the GATT negotiations the existing multi-fibre arrangement has been rolled on for another year. I shall raise his first point with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): Will my right hon. Friend provide an opportunity next week for us to talk about welcome recent Government action on youth crime, especially the measures dealing with joy riding and with bail offenders, and other matters? Will he give the House an opportunity to consider the recent case in which, as a result of the Children and Young Persons Act 1969, a judge in Birmingham was unable to give more than a one-year sentence to a 15-year-old boy who killed a 24-year-old woman? The judge said that that had resulted in an injustice.

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend correctly says, in addition to the many measures of previous years, the Government have introduced further measures in the current Session of Parliament to deal with issues relating to crime—such as the measure dealing with offences committed while on bail, and the Aggravated Vehicles Taking Bill. We shall continue to do that despite the fact that the Opposition often turn out to be soft on crime. I can assure my hon. Friend that we shall continue to ensure that proper protection is given to our citizens.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Before next Thursday, may we have some highly secret information published as to how many people are on electoral registers in England and Wales? The registers have been published for Northern Ireland, and provisional figures have been given for Scotland, but we do not have the figures for England and Wales. We need to have them if we are to decide whether an urgent debate is required on the position that they reveal.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman has raised that matter on many previous occasions and I have made clear the exact position. I understand that the hon. Gentleman is so concerned because he feels that his own position will be at risk in the forthcoming general election. On the information requested, the electoral registers will be published in good time.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): In view of the extraordinary revelations published in *The Sunday Times* about the long-held beliefs of the Leader of the Opposition, does my right hon. Friend believe that it would be helpful to the electorate to have a debate on the role of the Leader of the Opposition and his fitness for office, bearing in mind that leopards who protest that they have changed their spots are almost always kidding?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend has made his point. I cannot promise a debate next week, but some of the complete reversals of principle and policy undertaken by the Leader of the Opposition in recent years will be the subject of much discussion in the period ahead.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The Leader of the House will be aware of the expectation that an order would come before the House to allow the Welsh Grand Committee to meet in Cardiff to debate the constitutional future of Wales—an issue which is particularly relevant in view of this week's opinion poll showing a 2:1 majority in favour of an elected parliament for Wales. What has happened to the order? Will it be debated next week? The Secretary of State for Wales suggested that the Welsh Grand Committee would meet in Cardiff. Is that likely, or is someone holding it up?

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales said that he would be happy for a meeting of the Welsh Grand Committee to discuss those matters, and that included its meeting in Wales. That requires a debatable Standing Order and the pressures on business next week are great.

Mr. Andrew McKay (Berkshire, East): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is some disappointment on the Conservative Back Benches that the debate next Monday on the sittings of the House report will be taken on the Adjournment? That will mean that many hon. Members, who believe that the intention of that report is about giving Back Benchers more time, will not be able to vote on an amendment. Such an amendment would be directed at the Leader of the Opposition, who uses 40 words when four will do and abuses Prime Minister's Question Time twice a week, which keeps us out.

Mr. MacGregor: The latter point is not a matter for me. On my hon. Friend's first point, he will know that the report of the Committee on working hours, under the chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), covered a wide range of ground and went much further than the simple point raised by my hon. Friend about giving more time to Back Benchers. It is also concerned with other issues as to how we handle the business of the House. It seems to me that the report contains so many recommendations that the House will wish to consider very seriously that it is not possible in the time frame of next week to have a debate on substantive proposals. In view of the wide interest in the report, it is right to have a general debate to establish the general reaction to it as quickly as possible. That is why I arranged the debate for next Monday.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): When the Leader of the House takes time off from considering D-day—declaration of poll day—will he arrange a debate next week, if not sooner, or have a statement made so that we may learn why the Home Secretary and his Ministers of State are increasingly interfering in the decisions of the parole board, such interference having risen from 3 to 30 per cent. in the past five years?

Mr. MacGregor: Not next week.

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): Will my right hon. Friend consider having a debate next week on the subject of personal savings so that we may know the attitude of the Labour party to the taxation of those savings?

Mr. MacGregor: I think we know that there are proposals from the Labour party effectively to increase taxation on a large number of savings. I welcome the opportunitty to highlight that as much as possible, and I hope that we shall have that opportunity before long.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Is it normal practice for a Minister to send a reply to a parliamentary question to a prospective parliamentary candidate? I ask that question because an article appeared in my local paper stating——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That seems rather wide of the business for next week.

Mr. Graham: Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for a statement to be made next week about an article in my local newspaper stating that the answer to a parliamentary question of mine had been sent to the local prospective Tory candidate? The article stated that the candidate had said that she had seen the reply. Is it normal practice for parliamentary answers to be sent to candidates?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not know the local paper to which the hon. Gentleman refers, and I do not know of the report, so I have to say that I know nothing about the issue.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): With the callous plundering of pension funds by that heartless monster Robert Maxwell, may I ask if my right hon. Friend is aware that my constituents who are today in receipt of pensions have been told that their pensions can be guaranteed only until the end of March and that beyond that date payment is in doubt? With two thirds of the pension fund stolen, and with doubt as to which part of the pension fund moneys belong to which pensions, may I urge my right hon. Friend to arrange for a debate to take place next week, or for a statement to be made, so that we may discuss the matter? My constituents are worried sick. In particular, we should be told whether the new section 58B in schedule 4(2) to the Social Security Act 1990 will be invoked.

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot immediately recall section 58B of that measure. I do not carry in my head the detail of every clause of every piece of legislation, but if it is the section which deals with guaranteed minimum payments in the event of pension funds not being able to pay——

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): It deals with creditors' preference.

Mr. MacGregor: That relates to the eventual situation regarding the protection of pensioners. As for the issues relating to the Maxwell pension funds, my hon. Friend will know that a number of investigations are going on now. I fully understand his concern for the pensioners. We shall have to await the outcome of the investigations before considering what action, if any, is required. The basic minimum pension arrangements are already in place.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the Leader of the House reconsider his decision not to allocate a half Supply day to the Scottish National party, despite the clear request of the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) on behalf of all minority parties? Is he aware that that would have been the ideal opportunity to discuss Scottish matters, particularly the Government's apparent change of heart on the decommissioning scheme which, despite the obvious cynicism involved, will be widely welcomed by hon. Members who represent fishing

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communities? What does the right hon. Gentleman think will be the reaction at the quayside in Scotland for a Government who have kicked that vital industry from pillar to post for the past six years and now, six weeks before a general election, decide to change course?

Mr. MacGregor: I disagree absolutely with the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the Government's position in respect of the fishing industry. As he knows, the main problem facing the European Community and fishing Ministers has been the decline in stocks and the consequent need for conservation. Unless that is tackled, there will be an even more difficult future for our fishermen. It is right for the Government and the Council of Ministers to concentrate on that aspect. As someone who has been involved in that question over the past six years, I assure the hon. Gentleman that enormous efforts are made to ensure that the fishing industry gets the best possible deal in the negotiations, and the Government have frequently been given credit for making them.

As to the hon. Gentleman's demand for a Supply day, I am—as I said earlier—bearing that request in mind, but it is obvious from next week's programme that the House has a great deal of business to complete. I have been giving Supply days fairly regularly, and I thought it right to respond to the request by leaders of Northern Ireland parties to provide time to debate Northern Ireland next week.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I urge my right hon. Friend to reconsider his decision, which he explained in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay), concerning Monday evening's Adjournment debate on the report of the Select Committee on Sittings of the House. Is it not the case that the House has an incomparable opportunity before Parliament is dissolved to benefit from the wide advice of many senior right hon. and hon. Members who are about to retire and who, looking back over decades of experience, know how our proceedings could be improved? If we do not take that opportunity, is there not a risk that the Committee's admirable report is likely to gather dust, and that nothing will be done to improve our procedures?

Mr. MacGregor: No, I certainly hope that that will not be the case. I established the Committee because I was anxious to make progress. The right hon. and hon. Members to whom my hon. Friend referred, who have given many years' service in the House but will not be standing for Parliament again, were able to put their points to the Select Committee—to which I pay tribute again as it completed an enormous amount of work in a short time. Monday evening's debate will provide an opportunity for right hon. and hon. Members to express views not only about the report's general tenor but about its specific recommendations.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate next week on the increasing tendency among health authorities to impose charges in national health service hospitals? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that Nevill Hall hospital, Monmouth, proposes to introduce car parking charges for its staff, out-patients, those visiting the sick, and hospital volunteers? Will the House have an opportunity to debate a practice which my constituents consider to be a gross violation of the principle of a free health service, and one that is indicative of the managerialism that is ripping the soul out of the NHS? The public could then decide whether they want a Government who believe increasingly in charging the sick, those who visit them, and those who care for them.

Mr. MacGregor: Those matters have been much discussed in the House and outside, and many of the scare stories have been disposed of. The hon. Gentleman speaks of "managerialism" as though it were something to be deprecated. I am sure that he understands that more effective use of the ever-rising NHS expenditure in directing it at patient care benefits patients themselves. It is indicative of Labour that it dismisses that aspect so easily, and explains why Labour is unable to present proposals for reforms that will ensure better use of ever-increasing resources of the kind that the Government have implemented.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): May we debate sport next week? As my right hon. Friend knows from his successful visit yesterday to my constituency, Manchester's Olympic bid is very much at the heart of the regional issue. Such a debate would give me an opportunity to record how pleased we are that the Government will back that bid, and how good that will be for the region's development.

Mr. MacGregor: I very much enjoyed my visit to my hon. Friend's constituency yesterday—and, indeed, my visit to Manchester as a whole. Before I left, the responses that I was getting told me that yesterday's announcement by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister would be widely welcomed.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): May we have a debate next week on animal welfare? Does the Leader of the House accept that stuffing 650 letters into hon. Members' postboxes is no substitute for a debate and a statement from the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food? In the first place, such action constitutes an abuse of the House.

If we had a debate, the Minister could explain why he sent around a limp letter full of excuses about animal welfare, but voted against the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill—along with 12 other Cabinet Ministers—in order to dish the legislation and protect fox hunters, allowing them to go around loosing their bloodlust on defenceless animals. It is time we had a debate to expose the hypocrisy of those Ministers and the Government.

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the fox-hunting issue is not as he puts it. I hope that he will consider what foxes do to other animals. As for animal welfare, I would welcome a debate on that whenever it can be fitted in, because I believe that the Government's record on animal welfare issues is very strong. We have placed great emphasis on such issues, and we have led in the European Community in that regard. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has played a notable part in the process.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that a most important Adjournment debate on the shipping industry is to take place next Thursday? It will

make particular reference to Dover's ferry industry, much of whose case may be put during it. The debate is extremely timely—five days before the Budget. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that a Treasury Minister will be present, as well as a Transport Minister?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot confirm which Minister will be dealing with that Adjournment debate, but I can certainly confirm that such a debate will take place on the important issue to which my hon. Friend has referred. I am well aware of the active interest that he takes in the issue: it is, in fact, his own Adjournment debate.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Is the Leader of the House aware that the south-east of Scotland is alive with rumours that the Government will be making a statement about the A1 between Edinburgh and Newcastle? Can he confirm that such a statement will be made at the Dispatch Box, rather than an announcement being made in a clandestine, underhand way? May we have statements from both the Secretary of State for Transport, on the English side, and the Secretary of State for Scotland, on the Scottish side—on the same day?

Mr. MacGregor: I shalll have to consider both the timing and whether a statement would be appropriate; I shall also have to consider whether two Ministers should deal with the matter. I will look into it.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Will my right hon. Friend consider arranging a debate next week about the security of hon. Members' offices, both here and in their constituencies? He may be aware that my office was broken into earlier this week, and that valuable computer evidence was stolen. Does he agree that such a debate is necessary to nail the lie that has been put about—primarily by Labour Members and, in particular, by the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain)—that a Conservative dirty tricks brigade was responsible? That would be understandable in my case, but it might not be in the case of other hon. Members.

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the matter. He has enabled me to say that I do not see any need for such a debate because the allegations made by some Opposition Members are totally without foundation.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Will the Leader of the House find time next week to debate the future of the 999 service? It has emerged in the past few hours that British Telecom plans to hive off the service to an independent agency. That will have a massive impact on the quality of service —[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] I will explain why. Such a move will pose a massive threat to the quality of service. At present, the 999 service rides on the back of the general operator service. People can drop their general operator work and respond immediately. The proposal also involves shutting down many telephone operator centres, as a result of which those operating the 999 service will have no local knowledge.

This constitutes a severe threat to people's lives and security. Dogma is involved here. The aim is to ensure that British Telecom satisfies the City's objective by cutting its staff in post figures, rather than protecting the public. The Government should make a statement about the matter next week.

Mr. MacGregor: I think that the hon. Gentleman has made a speech about the matter. I had hoped that he would say something about the allegations that he made about the computer issue. As I have said, those allegations are without foundation. I shall now reply to what the hon. Gentleman has just said. I know nothing of this report. I shall have to look into it.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week to debate the chaotic traffic position on one of Britain's arterial roads, the A5, which runs past my constituency? Is he aware that there have been serious accidents on that road? The fact that it has not been improved between Hinckley and Nuneaton means that jobs are being lost in the area, because land by the A5 in Hinckley cannot be developed. Will he deal with this matter with some urgency, please?

Mr. MacGregor: I will take up the point with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. However, I am sure that my hon. Friend will acknowledge that there has been a substantial increase in the road-building programme all over the country.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Although we welcome next Thursday's debate, can the Leader of the House assure us that the Prime Minister will take part in the debate so that, following his speech in Scotland last week, he can demonstrate an equal concern for the union with Northern Ireland and also show how we can have a form of decentralisation that is common throughout the United Kingdom? Secondly, on Tuesday's appropriation debate—

Mr. Speaker: Order. In business questions, can we have one question only, please?

Mr. Trimble: Then I shall save the second one for later.

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will not think that simply because one of my right hon. Friends does not participate in a debate it means that he is not intensely interested in the question. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made speeches on the Scottish devolution issue but does not take part in Scottish Grand Committee debates on the subject. I think that it is unlikely that my right hon. Friend will take part in the debate next week, but I have already discussed it with him, following the request that I had from the leaders of the three parties in Northern Ireland. I discussed it with my right hon. Friend before deciding on the business for next week, and I can tell the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. Friend was extremely keen to have that debate. As I say, it follows from the inititive that he took in Downing street.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate on post offices for next week? It would enable me to say how well post offices operate throughout the borough of Ealing, generally speaking, and to draw attention to the proposed closure of the Church road post office, Northolt, which would be extremely serious and inconvenient for pensioners and for mothers with young children, among others. The House needs to discuss this very important issue. That post office should be saved.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is extremely assiduous in bringing the concerns of his constituents to the attention of the House. I am sure that he will find ways of doing so himself.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): May we have a statement on the £55 million that the Government have offered to Manchester in respect of its bid to hold the Olympic games there in the year 2000? That debate would have to take into account the fact that when Manchester made its previous bid the present Prime Minister, who has now agreed to that money, was Chancellor of the Exchequer and earlier Chief Secretary to the Treasury. He was the man holding the purse strings then, and he refused to give Manchester a single penny piece. Now he stands on the doorstep of No. 10 gloating about it. Are not the Tory Government guilty of a bribe a day to keep the voters at bay?

Mr. MacGregor: It is typically churlish of the hon. Gentleman to take that position in relation to the Government's decision to give very substantial support to Manchester's bid.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Could we have a debate next week on NHS fund-holding practices? My right hon. Friend may not be aware that the Marshlands practice at Higham in my constituency has been a fund-holding practice since last April. Since then it has vastly increased the treatment that is given locally, not least by bringing in consultants, it has cut its waiting lists and it is giving better value for money. Does my right hon. Friend not think it important that during such a debate we could highlight the fact that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) is so impressed by such an effective piece of NHS reform that he wants to scrap it and put that practice under the remote NHS bureaucracy?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I want to find every opportunity to highlight the benefits that general practitioner fund holding is bringing to GPs and their patients. My hon. Friend has done that well today. I am sure that his constituents will observe the benefits that are being brought to them—benefits that the Labour party would wish to take away.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate next week on early-day motion 715, tabled on an all-party basis, dealing with the pursuit of peace in Somalia?

[That this House welcomes the news that, under the auspices of the United Nations, an agreement has been signed between leaders of the two warring factions in Southern Somalia; is concerned that fighting appears to be continuing and calls on the British Government and the international community to redouble efforts to achieve a lasting peace in Somalia; draws attention to the fact that the parties who are involved in the fighting in the south have no claim, separately or together, to represent the people of Northern Somalia; calls on the international community to recognise that the people of the North have expressed a wish for independence as the Republic of Somaliland; notes that there are very close links between the North and the Somali communities in Britain; notes also that the North suffered for years in a hidden war under the regime of ex-president Barre during which time families, relatives and friends of British Somalis were killed or fled the country; notes that there has been relative stability in the north for the last year under a de facto government which includes the Somalia National Movement and other northern groups; and calls on the British Government and the international community to do all they can to ensure that the representatives of the North are involved in peaceful discussions aimed at achieving a peaceful and long-term settlement by agreement, including settlement of the request for recognition by the Republic of Somaliland in the North.]

Will the Leader of the House accept that this is given special and increased urgency because of a letter that I received today from the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. James Jonah, in which he refers to recent consultations in New York with what he describes as

"the two Somali factions—Interim President Ali Mahdi Mohammed and General Mohammed Farah Aideed."

That omits the interim Government of the north, who wish independence as the Republic of Somaliland. The north is the area with which the Somalis in Britain have contact and where they have many relatives and friends who have suffered through the hidden war over the past 10 years that has left many dead and many refugees.

Does the Leader of the House agree that we should debate this matter and ensure that the House, the international community and the United Nations bring all parties to the table to try to achieve peace? Does he agree that that would be better than the danger of the south being led by one faction and the north being left out of the peace deliberations? I am sure that the Leader of the House and the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, will agree with the facts as I have described them. Can we have an opportunity to raise the issue publicly?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not see an opportunity for such a debate in Government time next week. It could be undertaken in ways that are available to hon. Members to raise topics. I am not aware of the letter to which the hon. Gentleman referred, but I have seen the early-day motion. As he knows, the Government welcome the United Nations initiative on Somalia. I understand that a conference is to be held in Mogadishu later this month to which all factions will be invited.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): May I join those who have asked my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to arrange an early debate on the national health service? Is my right hon. Friend aware that a recent visitor to the Manor House hospital in my constituency described it as a unique hospital with a very high quality of care for patients, many of whom are members of the TUC?

Is not it a double standard to say that private health care is good for members of the Trades Union Congress and bad for the rest of us? Is my right hon. Friend aware that the visitor who displayed those double standards was none other than Mrs. Glenys Kinnock?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend that that shows the Labour party's hypocrisy on this issue. It devotes so much energy to condemning those who pay for their hospital treatment through hospital subscriptions, thus adding to the resources of the health service, as do many at the hospital to which my hon. Friend referred. Such people also help hospitals to raise substantial sums, a process which the Labour party also criticises. I

understand that Mrs. Kinnock was praising that fund raising at the hospital last week. It seems that there is one law for TUC members and another for everyone else.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Many people will be disappointed that the Leader of the House did not announce a debate next week on the future of Kuwait, bearing in mind the fact that tomorrow is the anniversary of its liberation. The Leader of the House will know that many people from this country and others died or suffered to free Kuwait but, now, a year later, 1,053 Kuwaitis are still being held by Saddam Hussein. I have spoken to families who were prisoners of war and had to leave relatives behind when they returned to Kuwait, so they know that they were alive.

In addition, the Kuwaiti Government, whom we saved and restored, are discriminating against members of the New Democracy Movement there and are refusing to allow observers to ensure that the elections are fair. I hope that we can have a debate about that, because we need to expose the hypocrisy of the Kuwaiti Government and we need to achieve true democracy as the United Nations intended.

Mr. MacGregor: It would not be right for me to comment in business questions on the issues that the hon. Gentleman has raised, but I recognise the importance of having a debate on Kuwait at some point. The difficulty is simply that many important issues are being raised, and at the request of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs we shall discuss Yugoslavia in next week's estimates debate. It is just a question of if and when one can fit a debate in.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): May I first express regret that the Leader of the House lowered himself by replying to what was obviously a planted personalised and despicable attack on the spouse of a politician? I do not think that that speaks volumes for his confidence about the forthcoming election.

May we have a statement next week on the Government's attitude, especially the Prime Minister's, to national stadiums? We welcome the fact that £55 million may be made available for a stadium in Manchester, but is the Leader of the House aware that meetings have been held and repeated requests made to people up to and including the Prime Minister, by myself and colleagues from Lanarkshire, for a commercially viable proposition for a new national football stadium in Lanarkshire, which would service all sports, would create 3,000 jobs and would require finance, private sector led, of less than £20 million—less than half the amount needed for Manchester? May we have a statement to explain why that cannot be provided, as it would create jobs and an unparalleled resource in Scotland? Only £3·5 million is offered for the patch-up job that is to be done on Hampden.

Mr. MacGregor: I do read newspapers, and I was aware of the report to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) referred. *[Interruption.]* I will tell the hon. Gentleman why. I think that it speaks volumes for my dislike of hypocrisy. It was perfectly right to draw that issue to the House's attention.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, Manchester made a specific bid for the Olympics and it was right for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to consider it. I am well aware of the working party on Lanarkshire and of the significant sums that are being proposed and spent in the area. I agree that it is right to do so because of the particular difficulties that have been created by the need to restructure the Lanarkshire economy.

Pension Rebates Review

4.22 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): With permission, I wish to make a statement on the outcome of the regular five-yearly review on the level of national insurance rebates for people contracting out of the state earnings-related pension scheme—SERPS—and on our plans to build on the huge success of personal pensions introduced in 1988 in extending individual choice, opportunity and ownership.

In respect of the contracted-out rebates, I have today laid the relevant reports by the Government Actuary and myself, with a draft amending order and regulations, to establish the level of rebates for the period beginning in April 1993, which need to be set within the present financial year in accordance with the Social Security Pensions Act 1975 and the Social Security Act 1986.

As the House knows, employment which is contracted out of SERPS attracts a rebate on class 1 national insurance contributions. For the five years from April 1988 to April 1993, it is set at 5·8 per cent. of earnings between the lower and upper earnings limits—2 per cent. on the employee's contributions and 3·8 per cent. on the employer's. The rebate is based on the cost to salary-related occupational pension schemes of providing the guaranteed minimum pension which such schemes must provide as the condition of contracting out.

An additional 2 per cent. incentive is payable from the national insurance fund to people in occupational pension schemes which newly contract out of SERPS between 1988 and 1993 and to people who contract out of SERPS in favour of a personal pension. That 2 per cent. incentive ends in April 1993.

The level of rebate required to provide guaranteed minimum pensions in contracted-out schemes is, naturally, falling, because the cost of the transitional arrangements that we introduced for older employees as part of our 1988 pensions reforms reduces in each new quinquennium as those people reach pension age. In the consultation paper issued last autumn, the Government Actuary indicated his initial view that the appropriate rate for 1993 to 1998 would be 4·68 per cent. In his final report to me, following extensive consultation, he has concluded that the range of uncertainties caused by the European Court of Justice Barber judgment concerning equal treatment in occupational pension schemes, which will take some time to resolve, make it more sensible for the rebate level to be based on the costs for the first three years of the period only, which he assesses at 4·77 per cent.

I accept his view and his recommended figure, subject only to rounding the figure to 4·8 per cent. Accordingly the regulations laid today provide for a rebate at that level from April 1993. I propose that it should be split 1·8 per cent. for employees and 3 per cent. for employers.

In my statement to the House about the Barber judgment on 26 June last year, I said that we would be consulting the pensions industry and other interested parties on the implications of equal treatment for the current arrangements for contracting out. Those consultations are under way, and it is clear that changes will be needed to the basis on which pension schemes can contract out of SERPS. In considering what those changes should be, we intend now to give particular consideration to the scope for moving from flat-rate rebates to rebates related to age, at least for personal pensions and possibly also for other contracted-out schemes. Decisions on how to achieve equality in state pension age, on which I published a discussion paper in December, will also have an important bearing on the many complex and detailed issues which will need to be resolved.

In carrying forward this work, our aim will be to ensure a sound basis for the continued operation and development of salary-related schemes and to expand further the new opportunities for millions of people created by our changes in the 1980s, which opened the way to contracted-out money purchase schemes and personal pensions and gave greater scope for individuals to enhance their retirement provision with additional voluntary contributions.

Personal pensions in particular have proved an outstanding success. More than 4·6 million people have chosen to save for their retirement by contracting out of SERPS in that way, taking advantage of the choice, flexibility and portability which such pensions can provide. Many of them would not have had access to an occupational scheme, and they also include many who would not previously have planned ahead for retirement in this way.

The flat-rate nature of the rebate has, however, meant that the advantages of personal pensions have been greater for younger people than for older ones. As I said earlier in my statement, we intend to examine the scope for age-related rebates more generally. Meanwhile, however, we have decided that it would be right to take an early step in that direction in relation to personal pensions. Accordingly, we propose that from April 1993 there should be an age-related additional rebate of 1 per cent. over and above the basic 4·8 per cent. contracted-out rebate for personal pension holders aged 30 or over.

This is a further important step in encouraging the development of personal saving for retirement. Coupled with our firm and continuing commitment to the basic rate retirement pension, protected in value, it will, I believe, be welcomed in the House and outside.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): Will the Secretary of State tell the House what he pointedly omitted to tell it? What is the cost of the 1 per cent. bribe for private pensions which he is announcing for people aged 30 or more who will be given age-related rebates? Will he confirm that the bribe will cost about £600 million over five years, which is equivalent to more than £350 for every pensioner on income support?

Will the Secretary of State also confirm that the whole package will cost £7·1 billion of taxpayers' money now in order to save about £4 billion in reduced benefits at some stage in the next century, so the net cost is more than £3 billion, which is equal to £300 for every pensioner in the land? Why did not the right hon. Gentleman's statement acknowledge that the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee have strongly condemned—*[Interruption.]* I notice that Conservative Members do not like to be reminded of the degree of the bribe being given by the Government in this pre-election period or of the losses to ordinary pensioners.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee have strongly condemned him for wasting nearly £9·5 billion of public money in the past five years in order to save only £3·5 billion in reduced benefits, and for losing another

£800 million in tax revenue? Will he confirm that he was also castigated for so depleting the national insurance fund by those manoeuvres that he has had to transfer nearly £2 billion of national insurance expenditure to general taxation, and that that is the equivalent of about 1½p on the basic rate of tax?

Is not it clear that, not only in the Budget but 12 days beforehand, the Government are hell-bent on bribing people with everyone else's money—including that of the poorest people? The Government say that they believe in choice, but is not it clear that they choose sweeteners for a select group of private pensioners at the expense of nearly 2 million of today's pensioners who are left in poverty? How can the Secretary of State justify spending £600 million on private pensions when an ordinary single pensioner has seen his or her pension cut by more than £17 a week, compared with Labour's earnings formula?

Why does the right hon. Gentleman feel that it is so necessary to bribe people to join private pension schemes? Is it because private pensions cannot compete with occupational pensions or with SERPS? Why does not the right hon. Gentleman treat SERPS, occupational pensions and private pensions on a fair and equal basis, so that people can choose the best value for money, rather than being manipulated into the Government's preferred ideological option?

Before the Secretary of State asks what Labour will do, I shall tell him that we shall abolish the current 2 per cent. bribe, and that we shall not implement the new 1 per cent. bribe in April 1993. Our priority is today's pensioners, who are in far greater need and who have been treated so shabbily by the Government for the past 13 years.

The Government's package is an abuse of public funds. It bribes people to join expensive and highly risky private pension schemes and cheats today's pensioners of money that they need. They have a right to that money, and we shall ensure that they get it.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman's last remarks did not surprise me in the least. They were absolutely in line with his party's relentless hostility to almost every extension of choice and ownership, whether in housing, in shares or, as now, in pensions. More to the point, I should like to know what the hon. Gentleman means by saying that he would abolish the 2 per cent. incentive. That is due to come to an end at the end of the forthcoming financial year in any event. He could abolish it, and change the status quo, only by taking away commitments that have already been made and taken into account in existing pension contracts, thus retrospectively disturbing arrangements that people had already entered. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will wish to clarify that matter at some stage.

I cannot confirm, because I do not fully recognise some of the figures that the hon. Gentleman used, what he said about the cost to the national insurance fund. However, I can tell him that as a result of the rebate which I have announced—the basic rebate from April 1993, combined with the disappearance of the 2 per cent. incentive and the addition of the 1 per cent. age-related addition for people over 30—there will be a substantial reduction in expenditure on rebates from the national insurance fund, arising principally, of course, from the reduction in the basic contracted-out rebate.

The last point on which I want to touch goes to the heart of the hon. Gentleman's comments and his hostility to the rebate system. The figures that he uses persistently include the basic contracted-out rebate as well as the personal pensions incentive——

Mr. Meacher: That is what the National Audit Office says.

Mr. Newton: I heard that. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has read what the Institute of Fiscal Studies —usually one of his favourite bodies—said last week about the NAO report:

"The majority of the cost of personal pensions arose from the cost of the contracted-out rebate"—

the basic rebate introduced by the Labour Government in the mid-1970s. The institute continued:

"An obvious corollary of the NAO's argument that the cost of personal pensions was excessive is that the cost to the National Insurance Fund of rebates to occupational pension schemes is also excessive."

If, as I suspect, that is the hon. Gentleman's view, he should come clean. He will not be happy until there is no alternative to state provision and whatever the state decides to provide.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know that this is an important statement, but we have an equally important debate on Welsh affairs today. I will allow questions to go on until 4.55 pm; then we really must move on because I will have to put a limit on speeches in any event in the Welsh debate.

Sir Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): Is not it clear that personal pensions represent one of the greatest successes of the Government, and that as a result of their introduction millions of our fellow citizens enjoy the prospect of a very good pension? That has been brought about by the incentives that are so deplored by the Opposition. My right hon. Friend will find that there are many Conservative Members sitting behind him who will warmly endorse what he has done in the past and even more warmly endorse today's news that the 1 per cent. rebate will apply on an age-related basis.

Finally, is not it clear from what the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said that the millions of people who have become holders of personal pensions over the past few years will wish to know whether his remarks imply that there is to be some retrospective action by an incoming Labour Government which would not only show Labour's well-known opposition to the concept of personal pensions but put in jeopardy the pensions which have been built up over the past five years?

Mr. Newton: Taking my hon. Friend's last point first, it is certainly true, if the words of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) meant what they appeared to mean, that they would involve depriving average personal pension holders of about £5 a week of contributions to their personal pensions which they have already committed.

Mr. Meacher: Bribery.

Mr. Newton: I take that sedentary observation as confirming what I say—it is precisely the commitment made in the last shadow Budget. We all wait with bated breath for the next shadow Budget.

I am grateful for my hon. Friend's earlier observations, which were entirely true. We have enabled millions of people who were not in occupational pension schemes to

[Mr. Newton]

embark on a new form of saving for their retirement, a form which gives them greater flexibility and choice. What is more, there are some signs, admittedly from limited survey information, that about 40 per cent. of those people are putting more than the rebate into their personal pension schemes. In other words, this has had an important effect in stimulating personal saving for retirement.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): The Secretary of State knows that I do not share the hostility emanating from the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), to private pensions. But may I repeat the question that the hon. Gentleman sought to ask? What is the Government Actuary's assessment of the cost of the 1 per cent. additional rebate? I well understand the reason for trying to include an age-related element, but, without the 1 per cent., would not that have been equally possible by using a figure of less than 4·8 per cent. for those under 30 and more than 4 per cent. for those over 30?

Mr. Newton: The estimate of the cost to the national insurance fund of the 1 per cent. additional rebate that I have proposed is about £175 million a year. Against that, savings of the better part of £2 billion a year will arise from the other changes which I announced today—including my confirmation of the fact that the 2 per cent. incentive will disappear in April 1993. I hope that that is reasonably clear.

On the wider point that the hon. Gentleman raised, I reiterate that I am grateful for his general support for extending choice and opportunity in the way that we have sought to do.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): If the growing number of elderly people are to be assured of a decent pension in future without placing an impossible taxation burden on the rest of the work force, bearing in mind that pensions are paid for on an annual basis, is not it essential that personal pension provision is increased and is not it right that the Government have come forward with this welcome statement, which amounts not to a bribe but to a much-needed bonus for self-reliance and self-provision?

Mr. Newton: Yes. I obviously very much agree with my hon. Friend. The fact that 4·5 million of our fellow citizens have taken advantage of those opportunities, together with many more in company-operated money purchase schemes—of which 20,000 have been created since 1988—shows that that is meeting a widespread wish for people to make more choices for themselves and to have more say over their own provision for retirement. That will be welcomed generally almost everywhere, except among Opposition Front-Bench Members, as a sensible way to proceed.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): As someone who is committed to free choice—whether to belong to one's trade union at GCHQ, to buy one's own council house or to have control over one's pension assets—may I return the Secretary of State to the costs of the proposals? What was the cost in respect of the national insurance fund of the rebate during the first five years and what is it in the second five years? Or, in this pre-election period, is the statement that there is no such thing as a free lunch being put to one side?

Mr. Newton: I have given the figures requested by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). The House must focus on the extent to which, as a result of the kick-start that we have provided through the incentive introduced in 1988, there has been a massive expansion in the number of people saving for their own retirement and, as I said a moment ago, many people now put in more money than they receive from the rebate itself. I have no doubt that that is in the interests of the development of a sound, long-term structure for pension provision, for reasons that were made clear in the supplementary question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson).

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, when those people who are thinking of contracting out consider the exchanges that have taken place in the House today, they would do well to bear in mind that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) was quoted in *The Star* on 28 August 1991 as saying that there was no way in which any political party would commit itself to a common retirement age of 60 because the cost would be enormous? Does not that show that when the hon. Member for Oldham, West has a choice between common sense and party dogma, at the end of the day, he will always opt for party dogma?

Mr. Newton: I can confirm that. If we had required confirmation other than from me—and I suppose that people might expect me to confirm that—that was all too clear in the response of the hon. Member for Oldham, West to my statement this afternoon.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that the erosion and undermining of SERPS have caused immense damage to those who will retire in future and will undoubtedly mean that, despite what he has said, many people will have to live in poverty unless—as we hope—a Labour Government reverse what he has done? Is there not a lesson to be learnt from what has happened with the Mirror pension scheme which is, admittedly, an occupational scheme? Theft and swindle in that scheme have meant that many pensioners simply do not know whether they will have a decent retirement. What has happened could happen elsewhere in occupational pension schemes or in the kind of schemes to which the Secretary of State referred.

Mr. Newton: I do not accept either of those points. The changes that we made to SERPS in 1988 were a necessary part of putting pension provision on a basis that was sound for the future and that was likely to be affordable by future generations. The worst thing one can do in respect of pensions is to make promises, upon which people rely, about what would be paid in 30 or 40 years time, but which prove to be unsustainable.

If I understood the other part of the hon. Gentleman's question alright, where people are members of a contracted-out scheme whereby the undertaking is to ensure guaranteed minimum pensions, in the relevant circumstances such schemes are underwritten by the state.

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in the light of the appalling fraud

perpetrated on the pensioners of the Maxwell-controlled companies, the case for personal pensions is stronger, because with personal pensions it is up to the individual pensioner to choose who manages that pension and in whom to place his or her trust?

Mr. Newton: There is certainly a wide range of advantages in money purchase schemes generally and in personal pension schemes in particular. The Government are trying to achieve, and have done so successfully, a wider spread of different kinds of opportunity for people to make provision for their retirement.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): The Secretary of State will be aware that many of the assets of the pension fund of the Mirror Group are in the possession of the banks. Is he willing to order the banks to restore those assets, or will he let them get away with that bare-faced robbery?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will realise that I have no power to order the banks to do anything. However, he will have noted the observations of some of the banks over the past few days. I cannot embroider on them or add to them.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement is most welcome, not only because it builds on the huge success of personal pensions but because it introduces for the first time the concept of an age-related rebate? Is not it clear that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) is against variety in pension provision and against choice in pension provision and wants to destroy personal pensions? Not content with that, did not he make it clear when we debated occupational pensions in 1990 that he wanted to impose such huge burdens on occupational schemes that many employers would withdraw altogether?

Mr. Newton: That is absolutely clear. One of the remarks in that regard, about which the hon. Member for Oldham, West is no doubt proudest although I do not think that he has said it since, is his remark of 20 June 1990 that the Labour party planned to

"turn the pensions market on its head."

That is a fine way of guaranteeing people security in retirement.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is not the truth of the matter that the electors will be bewildered by a Government who reckon that they are strapped for cash and who will have a public sector borrowing requirement of £30 billion after the Budget but who are handing out £6 billion to a small group of people from the pockets of others? Who is going to benefit? Those who will benefit are the merchant banker Tory Members of Parliament, some of whom have spoken today, and insurance companies that give money to the Tory party so that it can fight elections. That is not only bribery; it is hypocrisy as well.

Mr. Newton: I think that the hon. Gentleman might study the whole package of changes that were made in 1988 to which he referred. He might also just remember that I have made it clear several times this afternoon that the net result of what I have set out, including the necessary adjustment of the basic contracted-out rebate, is not a large increase in expenditure.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): My right hon. Friend's statement will be warmly welcomed by the pensions industry which has been greatly concerned about the problem of older pension contributors opting back into SERPS because of the current arrangements. I doubt whether the pensions industry would have been as pleased with the hostility towards the industry shown by the Opposition.

On a technical point, I welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to an age-related rebate in future. Will he ensure that, in due course, those provisions are taken together at the same time as his proposals for a state pension age which is the same for men and for women? The two will not work unless they are carried out together.

Mr. Newton: If my hon. Friend reads my statement carefully—it was admittedly a rather long paragraph—he will register that I have linked in one paragraph the action that will need to be taken in the wake of the Barber judgment in respect of occupational pension schemes, the action that will need to be taken following discussion on the state pension age, and the examination of age-related rebates. I certainly note my hon. Friend's point. He and many others will recognise that, if it is possible to find a way through more generally on age-related debates, it would be a significant further improvement in the whole structure of pension provision.

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government's pensions policy has encouraged many much younger people to take up pensions and those on much lower incomes to take out personal policies?

Mr. Newton: Yes. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Personal pensions have proved particularly popular among young people with relatively modest incomes. Typically, the personal pension holder receives about three quarters of average earnings. Fifty per cent. of them are under 30 and 80 per cent. of them are under 40. As I said in my statement, I regard as one of the great merits of personal pensions the fact that large numbers of people who historically would not have been thinking ahead and planning for retirement—we all remember the old Pearl Assurance advertisement—have started to do so. That is a major gain.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): When my right hon. Friend was doing his most excellent research for his wonderful statement, which will be warmly welcomed by those with personal pensions, did he look at the Labour party policy document that proposes new controls on the way in which private pension funds and other moneys are invested? Does my right hon. Friend agree that such proposals would reduce investment returns for those with private pensions and that, in consequence, under a Labour Government, private pensioners would be very much worse off?

Mr. Newton: It must inescapably follow that the policy that my hon. Friend describes would have that effect. Of course, it would make very little difference to personal pensioners, because the Opposition would stop them having their personal pensions.

Points of Order

4.51 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you will remember, at business questions the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and I asked the Leader of the House whether he could give us any information on a supposed decommissioning scheme for the fishing industry. The Leader of the House replied that he could give us no such information. The entire Scottish press corps believes that such a statement will be made at 5 o'clock in Scotland by the relevant Minister. Will Government Front Bench Members tell us what is going on? Is there to be a statement or is there not to be a statement? In this pre-election panic, why are the Government so anxious to avoid scrutiny by hon. Members in this Chamber?

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that, in reply to me, the Leader of the House suggested that a general conservation package was still being considered. If it is true that a statement is to be made in the next 10 to 15 minutes, it is very unlikely that such a package was still being considered as recently as an hour ago. I have a high regard for the Leader of the House and I am sure that he would not wish to mislead the House by suggesting that the Government are at sixes and sevens. At the very least, I know that you, Mr. Speaker, deprecate the idea of making statements to the press when, first and foremost, they should be made in this place.

Mr. Speaker: An opportunity may arise tomorrow if such a statement is made in Scotland.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You may recall that during business questions I raised the issue of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food placing 650 letters on the Board. They were all stamped. Normally, hon. Members are limited to six letters on the Board every day. On what basis can the Minister use the Board in that way? It seems quite wrong. Any statement by the Minister can be made at the Dispatch Box. It should not be necessary for Ministers to abuse the facilities of the House in that way. In particular, when we recently considered the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill, which the Minister voted against, he could have made a statement without filling the Board with material for hon. Members.

The matter is important because, in the period before the election, if every Minister takes the opportunity to spend taxpayers' money in that way, we shall be inundated. I assume that the Minister is using his power to abuse his position. Do the rules apply to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the same way as they apply to other hon. Members, or are Ministers entitled to commit such abuse?

Mr. Speaker: I understand that, following an application by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food early this morning stating that letters were required to be delivered urgently today to each Member of the House, they were accepted for handling by the Members' letter board. I am informed that the correct postage was paid on all those letters, should they need to be forwarded to Members. I have not had an opportunity of studying the letter, but I think this procedure might be examined by the Administration Committee in future.

Mr. Cryer: I am grateful for your response, Mr. Speaker, but I assure you that I have examined the letter —presumably you also received one—and there is absolutely nothing of any urgency about it. That suggests that Officers of the House have been misled by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food claiming that urgency was the key matter in terms of using the internal facilities of the House.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): I have a copy here.

Mr. Speaker: I have not had a chance to read it yet. I can dispose of the matter by saying that I will certainly look into it.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think I need to hear it. I shall look into the matter now.

Mr. Nelson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you are looking into the matter—I am grateful for that assurance—the issue on which many hon. Members receive the most correspondence is animal welfare. That excellent and informative letter was very gratefully received by me and many colleagues. It was excellent that the Minister sent it to us.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I fully accept your assurance. I received that letter early today and I went immediately to the Serjeant at Arms to complain. It is a very important and sensitive matter. Animal welfare is an important subject, but the letter was not urgent. It will simply encumber hon. Members' pockets for the rest of the day. I am sure that most hon. Members will never read it. It might be worth taking that point into account during your consideration.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members sometimes complain that they have not received information before they depart for their constituencies at a weekend, so the matter needs to be balanced. I have no idea how urgent the letter was.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Let us face it, Mr. Speaker—you have not seen the letter, but it was sent to 650 Members of Parliament using first class stamps. That equals £117. One hundred and seventeen quid has been spent by the Ministry—not by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The suggestion was that the Minister paid for it out of his own pocket, but he did not. It has come out of the taxpayer's pocket. The letter states that the Government have great concern about animal welfare, but they did not think about that when we debated the Bill to get rid of fox hunting. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food talks about furry animals: he was stuffing a dead furry animal down his son's throat on the telly.

Mr. Speaker: I think that we had better move on.

Welsh Affairs

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

Mr. Speaker: I should announce to the House that, in view of the late start of the debate and the number of right hon. and hon. Members who wish to participate, I propose to put a precautionary limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 7 pm and 9 pm. If hon. Members who are called before that time are brief, it may be possible, in the general interests of the House, to relax that limit.

4.58 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): This annual St. David's day debate on Welsh affairs is traditionally a time for reviewing the most important events that have happened in Wales over the past year, and also a time for looking forward and assessing prospects for the future. Before I refer to developments in Wales over the past year, I pause to express the regret that I am sure that we all feel that, since the last time we met on this occasion, my dear friend the late hon. Member for Monmouth, Sir John Stradling Thomas, is no longer with us, and the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas), and my hon. Friends the Members for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) and for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) are retiring at the general election. They have all served the House with great distinction and we shall be very sad to lose them.

It is impossible in the time available for me to deal with everything that has happened in Wales in the past year. However, I should like to touch on several subjects. Some topics, such as transport, will be dealt with by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State later in the debate if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Other subjects have been extensively debated in either the Welsh Grand Committee or the Welsh Affairs Select Committee. Most recently, we had an excellent debate on education a fortnight ago in the Welsh Grand Committee.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): We are not certain whether there will be any further opportunity to discuss Welsh affairs between now and the election, which may well be called in a couple of weeks, but it has been suggested that before then there could be another meeting of the Welsh Grand Committee to discuss important questions about the future structures of government in Wales. Are we likely to have that opportunity? Clearly, if we are not, those matters will have to be included in this debate. Some guidance on that would be helpful.

Mr. Hunt: I heard the hon. Gentleman raise that matter with my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council a few moments ago. I hope that we shall meet to debate devolution in the Welsh Grand Committee, and have that meeting in Wales, before the next general election. However, I readily accept that it must be done by agreement. I understand that discussions are continuing through the usual channels, and I hope that they can come to an early conclusion.

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): Of course, it is two weeks since my right hon. Friend raised this matter in the Welsh Grand Committee. He said that discussions were continuing through the usual channels. Does that mean that one of the Opposition parties is creating an obstruction to holding the debate and delaying it? I am sure that my right hon. Friend is being diplomatic, but will he confirm that that may be so?

Mr. Hunt: To be termed diplomatic by my hon. Friend is a compliment indeed. I used to be a usual channel, so I know that I must not trespass into that area, except to say that I hope that discussions will come to a successful conclusion as soon as possible.

The performance of the United Kingdom economy has been the background to events in Wales in the past year. I freely admit that things have been difficult. The world economy has been in recession, as has the United Kingdom economy. Wales could not possibly be isolated from those outside influences. However, our confidence in the underlying strength of the Welsh economy has been fully justified. The gap between Welsh and United Kingdom unemployment rates has continued to narrow in the past year. The latest available figures show that, for the first time in many years, average wages increased faster in Wales than in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Most encouraging of all, companies still want very much to invest in Wales. The year 1991 was particularly successful for inward investment. The 183 projects recorded promised more than 17,000 new or safeguarded jobs and more than £860 million of investment.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, as from 26 April, charges on the Severn bridge will be collected only from westbound traffic? Will he also confirm that tolls for motor cars will increase to £2·80, for minibuses to £5·60 and for lorries to £8·40? Does he appreciate the damage that that is likely to do to employment and investment prospects, let alone the Welsh tourist trade? Will the Secretary of State take a particular interest in my constituents in Caldicot, Magor, Rogiet and Undy, who took the advice of the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) and got on their bikes to seek employment on the other side of the estuary? All told, does the Secretary of State agree that the charges are a severe, major—with a capital M—blow to the Welsh economy?

Mr. Hunt: A few moments ago, Mr. Speaker asked all hon. Members to keep their speeches short. I said that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State would deal with transport if he managed to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I am happy to respond to the hon. Gentleman. The Labour party has never opposed tolls. If I recall, it imposed them. All the issues have been debated at great length. The good news for Wales is that we are to have a second Severn crossing and that will be complete in 1995. That is very good news.

Many major international companies have demonstrated and underlined their confidence in the future of Wales by establishing manufacturing operations in our country. It is even more encouraging that, once established, they stay and expand their operations. For example, the announcement by Sony last May of its expansion at Bridgend was one of the major industrial landmarks of the year. The initial phase alone will create 1,400 new jobs, with potential to generate many more. That is good news for Mid-Glamorgan and for Wales.

Before the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) interrupted me, I was about to say that I wanted to take this opportunity to thank everyone who played a part in securing that record inward investment into Wales. Of course, it is not just a matter of the Government. In

[Mr. Hunt]

Wales we have a positive partnership in which local and central Government, the public and private sector and the many agencies come together to stress the benefits of investing in Wales. They have as their trump card the quality of the work force in Wales. I praise everyone who has taken a great deal of time and trouble to enable us to win that record level of investment.

What is particularly heartening about the projects which have come to Wales, and the indigenous companies that have expanded their operations, is the diverse nature of the operations involved. They represent the future for Wales and the growing divergence of the economy.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): Is the Secretary of State aware that there are grave worries in Wales that we do not possess a statistical database on our strengths and weaknesses to enable us to attract the next generation of investment from abroad into Wales? That was highlighted in the report by the Comptroller and Auditor General which was discussed recently by the Public Accounts Committee. It said that we did not have a sufficiently rigorous database to tell us the real effect of the valleys programme and other programmes. Will the Secretary of State do something about that and improve it?

Mr. Hunt: Yes, I should like to improve it. We are extremely rigorous in the payment of regional selective assistance, which is paid only in relation to the numbers of jobs created. However, it is important to improve the database. I know that I could say that one need only go down the M4 and A55 to see the new factories and new opportunities, but we need to do more than that. We need to identify the strengths and weaknesses. My predecessor did that with the financial services initiative and a range of other initiatives. I seek to do the same in other areas. But the hon. Gentleman is right: we would benefit greatly from improving the statistical base. I must continually balance the cost of obtaining the information against the benefit. However, I believe that it is right to improve the position.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): The Secretary of State said something which we in mid-Wales are a little tired of hearing. He mentioned the M4 and the A55. Of course we welcome what has happened along those belts. However, there is an awful lot of Wales in between the two. In the rest of his speech, will he bear it in mind that unemployment in Powys has increased by 30 per cent. in the past year? We feel that, despite the great efforts of the Development Board for Rural Wales, the area is somewhat neglected by the Welsh Office.

Mr. Hunt: That is interesting. I was about to come to that in my speech, but I will deal with it now.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hunt: Wait a moment. I ought to reply to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile).

I spent some time at Welshpool just a few days ago. I went to see the site of the new Fisher-Gauge factory. The hon. and learned Gentleman will know that I went to see Bill Fisher in Peterborough in the state of Ontario in Canada. I applaud him for the fact that he decided to come to mid-Wales even though he had many other locations to consider, including some in our competitor countries in the EC. I was particularly pleased at the way in which everyone came together to secure that inward investment. Just as I was delighted by the help of the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) over inward investment by the Diagnostic Products Corporation of Los Angeles at Llanberis, I am equally delighted by Fisher-Gauge.

We intend to do our utmost to bring much-needed investment to all of Wales. When I was first appointed Secretary of State, I said that I wanted prosperity to spread to all parts of Wales. That is still my determination. I hope that Welsh prosperity will never again be threatened by over-reliance on a few industries.

Mr. Rowlands: Before he heads for mid-Wales, will the right hon. Gentleman pause at Merthyr for a moment? I wish to draw his attention to the depressing and sad fact that next month could be celebrated by a two-week lay-off at Hoover. That experience will be shared by workers at Hotpoint and the people in the Minister of State's constituency. After 10 years of technological investment, changes in work practices, alterations and 4,000 job losses —that is equivalent to losing a steelworks—people are still having to face a two-week lay-off. Is that the economic miracle that we were expecting?

Mr. Hunt: I know that the hon. Gentleman may feel it necessary to stress the bad side, but—[HON. MEMBERS: "Come on—answer."]—There are some positive sides to Merthyr. There has been an announcement that yet another Japanese company, and the first company to come in from Singapore, will fill those two factories. He and I were present at the launch of the east Merthyr reclamation scheme. There is a great deal of activity.

I cannot insulate Wales—nor can my ministerial colleagues, the Welsh Office or anyone else in Wales—against the effects of the recession outside, which has hit the white goods sector in particular. I do not think that hon. Members would expect anything else. Hotpoint, Hoover and other such companies are feeling the effects of the downturn in consumer spending, and I hope that that is a short-term problem.

Why are people still so anxious to invest in Wales? There are a number of reasons. One is the quality of the work force, which has the skills required by investing companies. That brings me to the first major development of the year that I wish to mention. Last September, the Prime Minister announced that responsibility for training would transfer to the Welsh Office from the Department of Employment. That transfer will take effect from 1 April.

From then on, the Welsh Office will be a training, education and enterprise Department. That will present us with an unprecedented opportunity to develop our people's potential. We also now have a full network of training and enterprise councils, drawing on the energy of local employers to develop the skill base. We issued strategic guidance to our TECs in November, which set a challenging agenda and I hope emphasised our determination to ensure that everyone is working in harness to develop the skills and enterprise of our people.

The TECs are prime examples of our policy of allowing those most closely involved with an activity to share responsibility for directing and undertaking it. I have sought to adopt that approach in other areas of community activity. I am especially pleased with the progress being made under the special initiative for the programme for the valleys, to encourage community

involvement in social and economic regeneration. Those include the community revival strategies, in which five communities are benefiting from projects which encourage the environmental, social and economic regeneration of those communities.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Could the Minister confirm that the Prime Minister has turned him over on his proposal for an economic forum for Wales, as suggested in his reorganisation of local government pamphlet, and that Downing street is blocking his proposal for economic regeneration work?

Mr. Hunt: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me a chance to repudiate a totally incorrect story. The proposal, which was put forward by the Council of Welsh Districts, is still under consideration; I have not yet reached a conclusion on it.

I recognise that, in recent weeks, there has been increasing interest in the issue of a Welsh assembly. The Conservative party certainly has everything to gain by widening the debate on devolution. I do not regard the forum as part of that debate.

Some of the most telling and the best arguments against a Cardiff-based Welsh assembly were made in the 1970s by the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), the Leader of the Opposition. Perhaps he has not changed his views on the subject of an assembly, which would go some way towards explaining some of the mess and muddle on the part of the Welsh Labour party, not only about whether they would impose an assembly on Wales but, if they did, about what it would be able to do.

I shall read one page. The Leader of the Opposition said that a Welsh assembly would not

"provide a factory, a machine or job, build a school, train a doctor or put a pound on pensions."

We have calculated that a Welsh assembly would cost £1 million per week. The right hon. Gentleman also said:

"Who is prepared to give up £1 million to be bossed about by an institution in Cardiff?"

He also said:

"A new slab of Government in the form of a Welsh assembly would turn into yet another costly millstone around the necks of the people of Wales."

I agree with those comments, and I agree even more with the right hon. Gentleman's comment that the Welsh assembly would take—*[Interruption.]* I know that Opposition Members do not like hearing the words of their leader, but I am determined to shove those words into the debate in every possible way.

The right hon. Gentleman said:

"that Assembly would take power and money from local authorities and the communities they serve"—

[Interruption.]

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. We do not conduct our affairs in this way. We debate by means of speech rather than bellowing across the Floor of the House.

Mr. Hunt: I agree with every one of the words that I am quoting from the right hon. Member for Islwyn, who continued:

"it would be even more centralised than the present system."

We have a right to know whether he has changed his view.

Mr. Raffan: While historical quotations are interesting, and the Leader of the Opposition will shortly be history, my right hon. Friend has given an estimate of the cost of an assembly. Can he also give the House the estimated savings of going to unitary authorities? Does he not agree that the situation has changed totally since the last referendum? The Government must tackle this issue in the current context of the need for a Government of Wales and the need for a strategic authority when we move to unitary authorities.

Mr. Hunt: I shall come to unitary authorities in a moment.

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I have listened with interest to the Secretary of State. He started off well when he mentioned devolution. Will he confirm that he has no intention of giving the people of Wales an assembly?

Mr. Hunt: I passed to the hon. Gentleman my only copy of "The Liberal Democrat Pocket Guide to Reform of Government". Could he possibly return that to me at some stage? However, I have a photocopy of it. [HON. MEMBERS: "The Under-Secretary of State has a copy."] I am talking about my copy.

A few days ago, the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) said that I was guilty of misleading the House because I said that the Liberal Democrats would make the post of Secretary of State for Wales redundant, once they had established the Welsh assembly. Page 8 of the pocket guide states:

"We would create a Welsh senate for home rule for Wales. The role of Secretary of State for Wales would become redundant."

That is what I told the House, but I was accused of misleading it. I often find the policies of the Liberal Democrats unintelligible, but I think that the hon. Gentleman should understand them.

Mr. Geraint Howells *rose*——

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East) *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: I shall give way.

Mr. Anderson *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State should make it clear to whom he is giving way.

Mr. Howells: Before the Secretary of State gets too excited, we are talking about the principle of devolving power and not the detail. Will he confirm, once again, that he is in favour of devolving power to the people of Wales? As I said on a television programme last night, it is a great pity that the Secretary of State plays about with a little piece of paper.

Mr. Hunt: It is not just any piece of paper; it is Liberal Democrat policy. If the hon. Gentleman does not know about that piece of paper, it is entitled "The Liberal Democrat Pocket Guide to Reform of Government". I understand that the leader of the Welsh Liberal party told the *Western Mail*, when told of the document, "Oh dear, I had better check this with a party official." I would hope that members of the Liberal Democrats would at least be in some control of the situation.

Mr. Anderson: The Secretary of State is enjoying himself by reading out comments by the Leader of the Opposition 18 years ago. We could enjoy ourselves by repeating what the Secretary of State said about the poll

[Mr. Anderson]

tax two years ago. Would it not be better if he were to consider the issues and tried to elevate the debate rather than to indulge in the diversionary tactic of referring to a meeting in Cardiff? Will he say yea or nay to whether, under any circumstances, he will grant an assembly to Wales?

Mr. Hunt: I have made my position clear. The hon. Gentleman may have changed his mind, but has the Leader of the Opposition? We have not yet heard whether he has, and that the right hon. Gentleman owes it to the people of Wales to explain his views on a Welsh assembly.

Does the Leader of the Opposition think that a referendum is still necessary or that an assembly should be established? Does he think, as he has said before, that such an assembly would create divisions in Wales, and not heal them? Does the Leader of the Opposition still believe that the £50 million that would be spent on the assembly, if the Labour party ever came into government, would be better spent on schools and hospitals? The Leader of the Opposition has to justify his series of U-bends and S-turns to the people of Wales. He and the Labour party have been running away from this issue for too long.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) referred to the diversionary tactic of the Welsh Grand Committee. That is an important Committee of this House, and I want it to meet in Wales and to debate the issue of devolution. If that is not possible, I make it absolutely clear today that I want the Leader of the Opposition to participate with me in a live, televised debate on that subject in the next few weeks. The hon. Member for Caernarfon would agree to participate, and I also know that the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North would. It is time that the Leader of the Opposition set the record straight and stopped standing on his head. The people of Wales have a right to know.

I want to marshal my arguments about a Welsh assembly, but I wonder whether the Leader of the Opposition has any arguments left to marshal.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): On the subject of the Welsh Grand Committee meeting outside the House, the Secretary of State will know that, if that is to happen, we need a debate to change the Standing Orders. That is what the Leader of the House said. Is the Secretary of State saying that he is wrong? Did the Secretary of State clear the matter with the Leader of the House to make arrangements smoothly before he threw it at us at a meeting of the Welsh Grand Committee on a day when I had constituents visiting the House?

Mr. Hunt: I do not understand which day the hon. Gentleman is talking about. That was not what I proposed at the Welsh Grand Committee. I did not mention a date. I said that I hoped that it would meet as soon as possible. I wish that the hon. Gentleman would listen to what I said, because, a few moments ago, I said that I had heard the remarks of the Leader of the House. It is possible to reach an agreement, and then it would not be necessary to hold a debate. That is being discussed through the usual channels, and I hope the matter will be resolved quickly.

I believe that we have everything to gain from a wide-ranging debate on the imposition of a Welsh assembly, which would run Wales from Cardiff. *[Interruption.]* The Opposition may not want to hear the arguments, but I shall ensure that they are heard by the people of Wales, and I shall seize every opportunity to do that.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): The right hon. Gentleman is frothing at the mouth so much that I wonder whether he thinks there is something dishonourable in changing one's mind. I wish that more politicians were willing to change their minds and were willing to say so, because there is nothing dishonourable in that. When the referendum on devolution took place, 80 per cent. of the people of Wales were against, but in the recent poll, 47 per cent. said that they were now in favour. Would he describe that as a U-turn as well?

Mr. Hunt: I remind the hon. Lady that, before the referendum campaign took place, more than 40 per cent. of the Welsh were in favour of a Welsh assembly. However, once they heard the arguments, they rejected it by an 80 per cent. majority. I am not calling the right hon. Member for Islwyn dishonourable—I called him the right hon. Gentleman. I just want him to say whether he has changed his mind, but he has refrained from doing so. I challenge him to spell out his party's policy, because many in the House and outside still do not know what it is.

Before hon. Members intervened about the Welsh assembly—I hope that we shall have a wide-ranging debate on that important issue—I was discussing the question of community action. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) will be aware that we have provided funding towards the establishment of the Cynon valley business leadership team and towards its agenda for action programmes in Wales. The purpose of the "Agenda for Action" is to encourage companies and business leaders to support and increase development and prosperity in their local communities. I want to see that sort of approach develop much more widely.

A key part of our economic regeneration strategy is our support for the Cardiff Bay development corporation. The scope offered by the restoration of the old bay area is being recognised by investors. For example, the Prudential insurance company has decided to locate there its new regional headquarters for Wales and the south-west of England which will provide 200 jobs. The completion of the barrage—the legislation is now going through the House—will attract up to 25,000 new jobs and private sector investment of more than £1,000 million. The barrage, when completed, will represent the most prestigious and impressive waterfront development in Europe.

There is a tendency—I believe an erroneous one—to consider economic regeneration only in the context of the old industrial areas, but the rural areas of Wales are of vital importance. It was in recognition of this that, just over a year ago, I launched my rural initiative. As part of that package, I made £15 million available in extra provision for rural programmes, together with an extra £5 million set aside for local authority capital projects. On 9 December 1991, I published a document that set out my objectives for rural Wales, and at the same time I announced a series of related measures. As well as further increases in resources for the Development Board for Rural Wales, the WDA, the Wales tourist board and the Countryside Council, an important element of my announcements was a new competitive programme for local authority capital projects designed for the benefit of

rural communities. I have set £6 million aside for that in 1992-93. The bids for projects under the programme are due in by next Tuesday. As last year, I hope that we shall have the greatest difficulty in deciding on the successful projects.

The key industry of the rural areas is of course agriculture. I fully recognise the difficulties which our farmers are facing at present. I firmly believe that a healthy agricultural sector is vital to the future economic, environmental and social well-being of Wales, and I assure the farmers of Wales that I will do everything in my power to achieve that. I am delighted that I have been able to secure for them the full 10 ecu increase in suckler cow premium funded by the European Community. I was also pleased to note last month that there had been an improvement in farming incomes over the past year, with aggregate net incomes rising by 15 per cent. compared with a fall in the United Kingdom as a whole of 14 per cent.

I have been twice, in the past three months, to see Commissioner MacSharry in Brussels to urge on him the necessity of any reforms in the common agricultural policy being fair to those, like our Welsh hill farmers, who are totally dependent on farming for their income. I promise our farmers that their interests are my interests and that their battle is my battle, and together we shall be heard in Brussels.

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the MacSharry proposals as they stand would be detrimental to Welsh lowland farmers?

Mr. Hunt: Yes, and I made it clear to Commissioner MacSharry that any reform of the CAP, which I believe must follow the GATT, must be fair to all farmers in the Community and not penalise Welsh farmers in particular.

Mr. Geraint Howells *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me for not giving way. I am anxious to make progress.

On my visit to Brussels last week, I pressed Commissioner Millan about the importance of releasing quickly our RECHAR money for support for Britain's coal mining communities. I am delighted that he announced yesterday a package that will provide some £21·1 million for south Wales. That will allow a whole range of further measures to be supported with European assistance, including the regeneration of derelict areas, the further development of small businesses, improving the quality of life, assisting the creation and development of local and community initiatives and the provision of further training in new skills. I have also urged Commissioner Millan to accept an additional bid, which I understand he is now kindly considering.

Mr. Geraint Howells *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: I must proceed, because many hon. Members wish to take part in the debate.

There are still in Wales areas which are over-dependent on a small number of employers. Those communities are particularly vulnerable if, for whatever reason, the employer decides to reduce employment in the area. When problems of that sort began accumulating in Holyhead, I asked the Minister of State to take special responsibility for co-ordinating integrated programmes for the regeneration of that area. In recent weeks, a similar situation has arisen in west Wales, with the decision by the Ministry of Defence—as part of its "Options for Change" rationalisation—to withdraw from Trecwn and to cease flying training from Brawdy.

No one, least of all Welsh Office Ministers, is indifferent to the impact of those decisions on the local economy. We responded immediately by setting up a task force to look at the economic consequences for the area and possible alternative uses, including Ministry of Defence uses, for the two sites. That task force's interim report will be considered by the strategy group, which I shall shortly chair at its first meeting. I am also looking forward to discussing the issue with the Welsh Affairs Committee next week.

Wales does not, and cannot, operate in isolation from Europe and the rest of the world, and that applies not just to our need to attract inward investment, at which we are outstandingly successful. Only last week, I went to Brussels to open the WDA's new offices there, which will provide a focus for Welsh business activity at the heart of the Community, and give interested parties overseas a key point of contact with those in Wales—not just the WDA but local authorities and the training and enterprise councils, which can help them.

I am delighted to have been able to support the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) to provide overseas marketing powers for the Wales tourist board. The Bill is now in another place, having completed its passage through this House. I have every confidence that we shall see it become law before the end of this Parliament.

We have also continued to work at our links with the four motor regions. I visited Stuttgart to meet the Minister President, Mr. Teufel, for talks last October, and my officials have had a number of exchanges with their opposite numbers in Baden-Wurttemberg. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State has visited Milan to discuss closer links with Lombardy, and he and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary have separately visited Barcelona for four motors-related activities. Next month will see a wide variety of events in a Wales week in Baden-Wurttemberg which will celebrate two positive and successful years of co-operation since we signed our partnership agreement with that region. I also have high hopes for our co-operation with Rhones-Alpes.

Europe is of vital importance, but our regional links also extend to Japan. We have an active partnership with the Oita Prefecture, and I was pleased to welcome Governor Hiramatsu to Wales for the Oita fair in October, where there was a display of the traditional culture and products from that area of Japan. We shall be organising a reciprocal Wales fair in Oita in October this year. This link has already led to orders for Welsh goods and services.

The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent will agree that Wales' great forthcoming attraction is the international garden festival at Ebbw Vale. Every time I visit the site, I am more and more impressed and excited by the prospects for the project. The transformation that is taking place on the valley floor and up the hillside is nothing short of remarkable. It will be a marvellous attraction for tourists and business and will do an enormous amount to prove to the rest of the world what we in Wales already know—that the transformation of the valleys is a remarkable event, and that Wales is one of the most attractive places in the United Kingdom in which to live and work.

[Mr. Hunt]

A key factor in forming our policies in Wales throughout this year has been the principles enunciated by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when he launched the citizens charter. We have already issued two charters in Wales. The first was the parents charter, which we launched last September, setting out parents' rights and responsibilities in a whole range of education matters. We believe in the right of parents to be effective partners in the education of their children and we intend to equip them to enable them to do that.

We shall also before long be publishing our tenants charter for local authority tenants, and Housing for Wales will issue its guarantee for housing association tenants. Consultation on both of those has now been completed. They will form part not only of our commitment to the citizens charter, but of the objectives which we have set ourselves under the Parliamentary Under-Secretary's document "Housing in Wales—An Agenda for Action".

I am delighted that I have been able to provide extra resources in 1992-93 towards the achievement of those objectives. For local authority housing capital programmes, total provision has been raised to £279 million. That includes an extra £80 million for mandatory home renovation grants, bringing provision up to £140 million.

I was also able for 1991-92 to provide record resources of over £117 million to Housing for Wales, and it is making excellent use of those resources. I have just had the opportunity, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), to open the 3,500th house that Housing for Wales has built in the last financial year. I expect the total Housing for Wales programme, including private finance, to amount to over £500 million in the coming three years. Those are major achievements, which will mean that Housing for Wales is making an exceptional start in reaching the targets that we set it in the "Agenda for Action".

I turn to the national health service in Wales, for which we have once again provided record resources in the current and coming year. The past year has seen a number of significant developments. We recently published "Agenda for Action Two," which sets out the key management action required of the NHS over the next three years.

We published also the patients charter for Wales, which has been delivered to all households. It will put the citizens charter initiative into practice in the National Health Service. We shall monitor the performance of health authorities against the charter standards, and health authorities will publish an annual report on their performance.

I was delighted to be able to approve the first national health service trust in Wales. The Pembrokeshire national health service trust will become operational on 1 April 1992. A further 14 health units have been invited to prepare formal applications for trust status in April 1993. Applications need to be submitted by the early summer. If they all decide to proceed, and are successful, that will mean that 65 per cent. of acute health care in Wales will be delivered via NHS trusts. The wide spread of interest in pursuing that option is a telling testimony to the benefits of trust status for those most concerned—the staff and patients.

Investment in the capital estate of health authorities during the life of this Government will be, including the provision for 1992-93, more than £1,261 million.

I am now pleased to be able to announce details of the all-Wales major health capital programme, where I intend to distribute £101 million. A copy of that programme, together with the new arrangements for allocation, has been placed in the Library.

In summary, I propose to provide some £55 million for centrally funded developments, most notably for the provision of a burns and plastic surgery unit at Morriston, the enhancement of adult and paediatric cardiac facilities in south Wales, and for information technology to assist health authorities in furtherance of the implementation of NHS reforms.

The sum of £33·7 million will be provided to meet the on-going cost of major hospital developments in course of construction—most notably at Ysbyty Maelor Wrexham, Ysbyty Glan Clwyd, Royal Gwent, Ysbyty Gwynedd, Brecon War Memorial hospital, University hospital of Wales, Cardiff, and Morriston. Included in that provision is the cost of design fees and construction works on major hospital developments, which will commence on the Ynys-y-Plwm and Baglan bay sites to replace East Glamorgan and Neath and Port Talbot hospitals.

New major works covering the provision of community hospitals, and costing some £6·7 million in 1992-93, will commence at Ebbw Vale, Torfaen, Barry, Cardiff and north Meirionydd. Some £5·2 million will be held in reserve against the possibility of new starts in 1992-93. The funding of those developments will be subject to decisions to be taken on future years' funding as a consequence of this year's public expenditure survey.

That programme has been compiled with the aim of replacing old hospitals that are coming to the end of their useful life. New community hospital developments will provide patient care in a near-domestic environment, close to patients' homes. Other developments included within the programme will enhance the facilities at existing hospitals.

One subject that I have not yet addressed, but on which I receive the most correspondence, and have had the largest number of meetings over the past year, are my proposals for the reform of the structure of local government in Wales, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn referred. I published my proposals for consultation last June, and am now considering the views expressed to me in response. The local authority associations discussed the results of an extensive programme of work commissioned by the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance, and I will reflect on the issues it raised before announcing a decision. That matter is of vital importance to everybody in Wales, and I shall inform the House of my conclusions in due course.

I am pleased to announce the Government's intentions concerning the promotion and safeguarding of the Welsh language. The past 12 years have seen a number of significant developments. In 1981, we established S4C. Its success is there for all to see. I am particularly pleased to note the indications that the S4C channel has become an important cultural force not only in Wales but increasingly further afield.

The past 10 years have also seen a further strengthening and consolidation of the place of Welsh in education. That culminated in the introduction of the Government's

proposals for Welsh in the national curriculum—widely recognised as the single most important measure taken by any Government in support of the language. The full effect of that policy will not become apparent for many years yet, but we made clear our commitment to giving every child in Wales the opportunity to become fluent in Welsh.

However crucial the role of schools, the language is not something that is or can be confined to the world of education. Over recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the position of the language in the community at large. Since being established by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) in 1988, the Welsh Language Board has become an important force for change. It has done much to raise awareness and to improve the level of service provided for Welsh speakers.

Under its chairman, John Elfed Jones, the board has made a significant contribution in the period since it was established. I am pleased to tell the House that the Government have decided that the board should be placed on a statutory footing. I am confident that, in its new form, and with new powers, the board will be even better placed to undertake the difficult challenge that it will face in future.

The House will be aware that, last year, the Welsh Language Board made proposals for legislation in support of the language, which I considered carefully with my ministerial colleagues. The board's proposals were themselves the result of extensive consultation, and I pay tribute to those who were involved in the considerable task of preparing them.

At the heart of the board's proposals was the principle of equal validity and, in the public sector at least, granting Welsh equal status with English. That principle is one in which I believe. In drawing up the proposals that I will present to the House in due course, I have therefore sought to concentrate on the practical implications of that principle and the elimination of some of the difficulties with which Welsh speakers can be faced.

I am persuaded by the board's argument that the progress achieved so far can best be safeguarded by further legislative underpinning. The Government will therefore bring forward a Welsh language Bill. The legislation will include a duty on local authorities and other public agencies in Wales to draw up schemes defining the service that they provide for Welsh speakers. Those schemes will have to conform to criteria covering all aspects of dealing with the public. The new statutory Welsh Language Board will have the key role of agreeing those schemes. Once they are agreed, the board will have the further task of monitoring their implementation and investigating complaints.

I want to reassure the House that that does not mean that everybody within the public sector in Wales will need to become Welsh-speaking. We shall build on and develop what is already happening. A range of Government Departments and other public bodies in Wales have already shown that much can be achieved by the adoption of imaginative policies, the harnessing of existing staff, and the use of translation services. Neither is it my intention that every public body should rigidly adhere to exactly the same policy. Instead, it will be the board's task to assist in devising policies that reflect the very different situations facing the range of public authorities in Wales.

The schemes will need to reflect the different positions of the language in, for example, the south-east compared with the north and north-west. They will also need to ensure that, in areas where Welsh speakers are in the majority, suitable provision is made for non-Welsh speakers.

For the first time, we will place consumers in a position where they will know what they can expect by way of Welsh language services from all the public organisations with which they deal. The board also made proposals concerning changes to the Welsh Language Act 1967, which I am minded to accept.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Will the Secretary of State's proposals include a right for children—if their parents wish it—to be educated in schools that teach exclusively through the medium of Welsh? Will it also include a right for children—if their parents wish it—to be taught in non-Welsh language schools where Welsh is available as a second language? That is an important issue in central Wales.

Mr. Hunt: I accept that. I refer the hon. and learned Gentleman to what the Minister of State has said about the whole question of Welsh-medium education. We need to provide every child in Wales with the opportunity to learn Welsh. However, I shall not stray too far down that road; if the hon. and learned Gentleman and others catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they can make their own speeches on the issue, and my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will try to respond. I have been speaking for some 50 minutes, but I have not yet finished my speech.

Let me explain to the hon. Member for Caernarfon that one reason why it took me 12 months—only 12 months—to consider the proposals put to me by the Welsh Language Board is the fact that the Welsh Language Act 1967 contains a mistake, which we now propose to put right. Section 3 currently allows Ministers to determine that, in the case of a dispute, the English version of a text takes precedence over the Welsh version. I am aware that a number of people consider that that is tantamount to granting a lesser status to Welsh generally, and I am happy to announce that I have accepted the board's proposal for the repeal of the provision.

It is, of course, important to get the legislation right. I shall be introducing a new Welsh language Bill—or, at any rate, I very much hope that I shall—and it will then be for the House to judge the proposals that it contains.

The Government's most important contribution is their help in creating an environment in which people who want to speak Welsh are free, and able, to do so. The present Government have an impressive record of pursuing many ways of creating that environment over the past decade. Throughout that period, we have had a guiding principle: ultimately, the future of the language depends on the people who speak it. It would be counter-productive to do anything that would disturb the current good will towards the language among Welsh and non-Welsh speakers alike.

Mr. Wigley: I have been listening carefully to the Secretary of State's important statement, and I welcome the news that legislation is to be introduced. It is difficult, however, to respond to that news without knowing all the details. Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether he intends to incorporate all the Welsh Language Board's proposals in the draft legislation, rather than just picking out one or two of them? In particular, can he clarify the position of defendants who want their court cases to be heard in Welsh? Will jurors who understand Welsh be present so that the impact of evidence for the defence can be fully appreciated?

Mr. Hunt: Now that I have announced our intention to introduce a Welsh language Bill, I shall arrange an early meeting with the Welsh Language Board. I want to go through the board's proposals. I am not picking and choosing—although some of the proposals strike me as unnecessary, while others would affect the principle of the random selection of jurors, which is a key principle of British justice.

I ask the hon. Gentleman to await the legislation. I have carefully set out a number of extremely important points which I hope he will have an opportunity to ponder. If he and his colleagues wish to discuss the proposals with me in more detail, I shall be happy to meet them.

I am confident that our proposals will help to create an environment in which Welsh speakers can continue to exercise choice and to speak the Welsh language for many years. The Welsh Language Board has an important role to play in creating such an environment, as does every branch of the public sector in Wales. My proposals create a clear framework in which they can do so.

No doubt a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House will say that I have not dealt with the specific issues with which they wanted me to deal. I trust that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will try to deal with some of them. I have been unable to address an enormous number of issues; if the House wished me to continue for another hour, no one would be more delighted than I, but I want to give others a chance to speak.

Let me conclude by saying that, despite a difficult economic background, this has been a good year for the people of Wales. They have experienced record inward investment; further commitment to the rights of the individual, under the citizens charter and other charters; and further developments in the integrated and partnership approach that has proved so successful in recent years. I believe that the Government have demonstrated their commitment to the people of Wales, and I am confident that the coming year will be as good a year as the past one. I am already looking forward to returning to this Dispatch Box in a year's time to report on it to the House.

5.55 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): That really was an "I am delighted" speech—but the Secretary of State cannot talk to me about U-turns. Dai Poll Tax cannot give us any lectures; Dai Poll Tax will get his answer at the general election. My right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) leads a united party, and that unity includes policy. On the occasion of the last Welsh debate before Labour takes power, let me reaffirm that Wales is a Labour nation.

At the beginning of his speech, the Secretary of State mentioned a host of past and current colleagues, expressing the feelings of us all. He also displayed his experience as a "usual channel". Certainly Wales has a good record in regard to inward investment, and we welcome the good news; but the Secretary of State must account for his stewardship.

In vain did we wait for an apology for the poll tax. The people of Wales are still listening attentively in the hope of hearing such an apology from the right hon. Gentleman. He made an important statement about the Welsh language, however—although I should have preferred him to make a statement proper; he now expects us to respond to the details in the way in which he has given them. None the less, I welcome his commitment to introducing a Welsh language Bill, and his announcement of a statutory basis for the Welsh Language Board. Let me say, on behalf of the next Labour Government, that we will introduce a Bill: we will legislate speedily.

At long last, the Secretary of State has acknowledged the existence of a consensus throughout Wales, and, at the appropriate time, we shall consider the small print of what he has said. At no point in his speech, however, did we hear mention of practical measures to tackle the second great recession that we have endured under the present Government. At no point did we hear of a determination to halt the rising tide of redundancies; nor did we hear of a will to present new policies to end the disturbing rise in unemployment. We heard of no social or economic policy initiative to give hope to those who lack jobs, the homeless and the indebted.

I have here the Conservative party's manifesto for Wales for the 1987 general election. It was full of honeyed phrases and grandiloquent statements, but it was a false prospectus. It made no reference to opt-outs, recessions, redundancies, homelessness or hospital trusts. I remind the Secretary of State for Wales that NHS waiting lists in Wales are at record levels. Hospital beds in Wales have been cut by 2,800. There have been too many broken promises.

When the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist) was a Minister with responsibility for health he gave this pledge:

"health authorities in Wales have been set a target to ensure that by March next year no patient should have to wait more than one month for urgent in-patient treatment, one year for non-urgent in-patient treatment and three months for a first-time out-patient appointment."—[*Official Report*, 6 July 1987; Vol. 119, c. 16.]

What happened? According to the House of Commons Library, since September 1987 the number of patients waiting for urgent in-patient treatment for more than one month has increased by 6 per cent., the number of patients waiting for non-urgent in-patient treatment for more than a year has increased by more than one third and the number of first-time out-patients waiting for more than three months has increased by 1 per cent. It is no wonder that when the Secretary of State published his patients charter he had to abandon the pledge made in the House in 1987 by his hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central.

One of my constituents wrote to me and said:

"I am writing to tell you I had Hodgkins Disease in 1984, and was very sick with the chemotherapy and radium. It came back in 1987 and I was very, very sick again with the chemo again. In October 1991, imagine my horror when the doctor said it was back again, but it was called non-Hodgkins Disease. I told the doctors I could not go through this again. Dr. . . . said that there was a drug on the market called Kytril anti-sickness pill, made by Smith Kline Beecham. This is the tablet to stop you being sick. So I started my chemotherapy again—a course of twelve treatments. I had to have a tablet every second one but after two I could not have any more because the drug company is charging too much . . . they can only give to very ill patients. It's not the doctor or the nurses fault. They would like to give it to every patient. It really upsets the doctor and nurses knowing that this tablet is available . . . Could you please see if you can help us?"

I have been a Member of Parliament for long enough to know that it is not wise to demand a specific answer from the Government. I do not have an answer for cases such as

that put to me by my constituent, who has suffered horribly and who cares enough about other people to write to me with her heartrending tale.

I want the Secretary of State, the Under-Secretary, the civil servants and hospital managers to concentrate 100 per cent. on relieving such misery and pain instead of running around Wales encouraging national health service managers to waste their time preparing bids to become opt-out hospitals. We know how hard it is to face up to specific cases. I do not demand that the Minister should respond today to this specific case.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): The hon. Gentleman knows that I shall have investigated by the district health authority concerned any individual case that he cares to put to me. Has he been in touch with that person's doctor about the clinical diagnosis? If the hon. Gentleman will send me the details, I shall look into the case, along with the district general hospital and the district health authority. I ought to point out to the hon. Gentleman, however, that since the Conservatives came to power spending on the national health service has increased, in real terms, by 62 per cent., compared with the 9 per cent. increase during the five years in which the hon. Gentleman had ministerial responsibility for health matters.

Mr. Jones: The Under-Secretary is the very man who is going round Wales urging hospitals to opt out. He is putting pressure on hospital administrators, but we want him to tackle the real problems that face the national health service in Wales.

The Government have spent the last 13 years undermining local democracy and eroding the quality of local services in Wales. There is no worse example of the Conservative party's arrogance, unfairness and disdain for public opinion than the poll tax. I remind the Secretary of State that more than £100 million has been wasted on its introduction and that more than 400,000 summonses have been issued in Wales. That is the cost of the Tory poll tax.

The Secretary of State may shuffle and squirm but he must listen and then consider apologising for the poll tax to the people of Wales. He has given quotations; I shall give one to him. At the 1989 Conservative party conference he said:

"The fact is that, whatever Labour claim or do, the community charge is on course for successful introduction throughout England and Wales next year."

That might wow the blue rinses at Blackpool, but it will not help the Conservatives in Wales. What we seek from the right hon. Gentleman is an apology for the poll tax.

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jones: No. There is very real pressure on time in this debate. The Secretary of State for Wales spoke for almost an hour.

We demand an apology from the Secretary of State. He owes an apology for the poll tax to the people of Wales.

Ministers wish to evade the Government's record on the economy. Unemployment is now four fifths higher than it was in 1979. The number of employees in manufacturing industries in Wales has fallen by almost a third. There are now, astonishingly, 94,000 fewer manufacturing jobs in Wales than there were when the Conservatives took office. There is no better illustration of the Government's erosion of our manufacturing base than Wales.

Recorded crime has doubled and criminal damage has increased by 185 per cent. Nevertheless, there has been one blazing success, one superb achievement by Welsh Office Ministers: they have managed to increase Welsh Office advertising and publicity spending by 2,253 per cent. I recollect that in a debate in the Chamber in 1990 the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) referred to a remarkable transformation of the unemployment scene. He can say that again. In last year's Welsh affairs debate the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) said —it was a very bold thing to say—that

"things are going to get better and not worse."

In the same debate the Secretary of State said:

"the Welsh economy is extremely healthy".—[*Official Report*, 28 February 1991; Vol. 186, c. 1149-207.]

What has happened? Mortgage repossessions have increased by 4,000 in the past year. There are 35,000 people who have been out of work for more than a year —three in 10 of the unemployed. This year already there have been 2,500 job losses and I understand that 1,600 workers are to be laid off at Hotpoint in March. That is not a million miles from the seat of the Minister of State.

The list of job losses is worrying. It is like a "Who's Who" of Welsh business. There have been job losses at Ford in Bridgend and Swansea, Royal Worcester, South Wales Electricity, National Power, Dunlopillo, Howells, British Steel at Shotton and Port Talbot and Ferodo in Caernarfon. There have been 250 job losses at Dennis Ferranti at Bangor, the Brymbo steelworks has been closed and there have been job losses at Lucas in Gwent, British Aerospace in Clwyd, Hoover and Thorn in Merthyr Tydfil and AB Electronics in Pontypridd. As well as the job losses at those great companies there have been many pit closures. The pits that have been closed include Mardy, Blaenant, Deep Navigation, Penallta, Cynheidre, Marine, Merthyr Vale and Oakdale. Those redundancies are building up in areas of Wales where unemployment is at its worst already.

The Secretary of State did not want to deal with those issues. He set up diversions and tried to concentrate on issues a long way from unemployment and the state of the economy. Since the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt) became Secretary of State, unemployment has risen by 50 per cent.—a staggering 40,000 increase. That amounts to 2,000 for every month that he has been in the Welsh Office. The Secretary of State has lost highly skilled Marconi jobs in his constituency. Many members of that work force live in my constituency.

Unemployment in the Pembroke area is nearly 90 per cent. higher than when the Conservatives took office. The Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett), has been watched closely by his constituents. Has he really fought his corner? We are far from convinced that he has.

Unemployment in Mid Glamorgan has increased by more than half compared to 1979. In the past year alone, unemployment in Brecon and Radnor has increased by 36 per cent. Unemployment has gone up in the Vale of Glamorgan by a quarter and in Monmouth by nearly a third.

It seems that Cardiff has become the unemployment capital of Wales. More than 20,000 people are

[Mr. Jones]

unemployed. In the Cardiff area, unemployment is 50 per cent. higher than when the Conservatives took office. The situation in Cardiff, Central is appalling.

The glib comments by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the complacent comments by the Secretary of State will not get Wales out of recession. Sir Peter Phillips of the Confederation of British Industry in Wales recently said:

"What we now need is a spark to recovery".

We will not get that from the Chancellor or the Secretary of State. In the face of the most severe United Kingdom recession in the past 60 years, the Government are paralysed by their failures. They have no strategy and do not know what to do. The Secretary of State's speech today gave no answers. There was no will to succeed and no policy. Wales has had enough of struggling out of the pit of one recession, only to be knocked back down again by the next. The Secretary of State must take that on board.

As the Government near their end, is not this a lamentable record? After all the propaganda, press releases, oil revenues, privatisation revenues and two savage recessions, what does Wales have? Wales has high and rising unemployment. Every week this year it has experienced blue chip companies making redundancies. This is a Government of failure and indecision. For those reasons, I predict that Welsh Office Ministers and their Back-Bench Members will lose their seats and a Labour Government will be swept into power.

6.16 pm

Mr. Ian Grist (Cardiff, Central): The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) made some glib predictions. Unemployment in my constituency was higher at the time of our triumph in 1987 than it is now. He might like to bear that in mind.

I made my maiden speech in the St. David's day debate in 1974, when three right hon. Members and one hon. Member from the Labour party were present and two Conservative Members were present. That Parliament ushered in a most extraordinary Government. The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) was eventually, and rightly, taken on as a Minister of State at the Treasury when real monetarism was brought into play. He would be the first to tell us that under the International Monetary Fund we went through the most unpleasant period of economic restraint. The right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) had to withdraw programmes right and left, whether on housing or health, the number of people treated as out-patients fell and the Government were split over whether we should remain a member of the European Community. The Cabinet was so badly split that we had to have a referendum. The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) was on one side of the argument and the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon on the other.

The Conservative argument won hands down on that occasion, as it did in the St. David's day referendum on devolution. The Labour Government were kept in office by the Liberals and the nationalists because of that argument, and when it failed the Government failed: the two matters were intimately linked. The Labour party should remember that. The current Leader of the Opposition, then the hon. Member for Bedwellty, in answer to a claim by Mr. Cledwyn Hughes that the arguments on devolution had been well ventilated, said that the idea had been shot as full of holes as a colander. That was one of the better cracks that he made on the issue.

That was a miserable Parliament. Labour left office after the winter of discontent, when there was darkness, unburied bodies and surgical operations refused, all because of trade union abuse of power. One of the great changes that we have introduced is to free people from the domination and bullying perpetrated by the allies and creators of the Labour party.

Unfortunately, we still suffer from some of the attitudes which were born in the 1960s and earlier but are responsible for some of the problems today. I refer to the attitudes, which I espouse, to relaxing the sexual and social traumas of the past, freeing people and leaving them to make their own decisions. Unfortunately, that has often been taken as a form of licence. We have seen the breakdown of family life, the abuse that has resulted from that, and the traumas and difficulties of young people having to deal with step-parents, and so on. That has led, ultimately, to a growth in illegitimacy, which is a problem in my constituency—other hon. Members will be aware of this—with many young girls coming in from the valleys and elsewhere, giving rise to housing problems. The growth in homelessness is based largely on people not being able to keep their tempers. Such breakdowns in family life can be traced back to the change in social attitudes in the late 1950s and 1960s and on into the 1970s. We are paying a heavy penalty for that.

In most respects, Wales has flourished. The physical appearance of the country alone tells us much. The streets, villages and town centres of Labour Members' constituencies have benefited from the urban programme and the enveloping of streets. I have had more enveloping in my constituency than any other in Wales. We have seen the renewal of the physical fabric, with the grassing over of enormous derelict areas by the Welsh Development Agency, which has conducted the largest programme in Europe. We are greening Wales again, making it an attractive place, and the garden festival is the most visible symbol of that. That has been one of the Conservative Government's greatest achievements.

The education achievements of the people of Wales, which we debated in the Welsh Grand Committee, have improved. There has been a remarkable increase in training. Employment, to which the Secretary of State referred in his speech, is now varied rather than our being trapped in two or three major declining old industries. I should have thought that everyone would welcome that.

New roads, which were cut when the Labour Government had to go to the IMF, have been constructed. I bitterly remember the dual carriageway to Merthyr Tydfil coming to an abrupt halt at Taffs Well—another project which foundered on the rocks of the overspending espoused by the Labour party in 1974-75. [HON. MEMBERS: "Nonsense."] If Labour Members contest that, the book of their former Chief Secretary is a good read: the facts are clearly laid out there.

Tremendous improvements have been made in the NHS. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside ignores the fact that fewer out-patients were treated when he was the Minister. Under the Conservative Government, out-patient treatment has risen by a third, in-patient treatment by more than 40 per cent., and day case treatment by

about 150 per cent. There has been expansion in the number of doctors, consultants, nurses and therapists. New hospitals have been constructed throughout Wales. Labour Members should use their eyes if they believe otherwise. We are now able to perform more hip, knee and eye operations.

The Labour party is trying to ride the *Western Mail* programme for devolution. That is not surprising because it is a media-run campaign. It is one of those subjects which, if raised with ordinary electors, never features. They are concerned about mortgages, jobs, the price of food and education, but devolution never arises. It is only when they are specifically asked and guided that devolution emerges, as it did in the 1970s. I am amazed that Labour Members advance such a policy, especially the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside who as Minister in charge of the policy at the time received a slap in the face from his constituents and from constituents throughout Wales. They knew that it was nonsense and that any form of serious devolution would mean, as the Liberal pamphlet rightly says, the end of the Welsh Office and the Secretary of State. But that might be a small price to pay compared with losing the voice of Wales in the Cabinet of the United Kingdom. The rights of Members of Parliament from Wales would be cut, because we should not be able to vote on issues affecting England and Scotland. We would have to be imperial Members of Parliament, voting on the big issues, but not on those affecting our constituents because they would be left with the Welsh assembly.

English Members of Parliament would not be happy because they would have to vote moneys to be spent by other elected bodies over which they had no say—unless, of course, we were to follow the logical path of having an assembly which raised its own funds, which the Labour party has never dared to suggest because it knows what it would mean and the answer that it would receive from constituents.

That is the underlying weakness of the talks about devolution. The Labour party should come clean by explaining to people the real repercussions of going down that path. I am sure that people do not believe in it any more than I do. The nationalists use devolution merely as a means of getting an independent Wales.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir Wyn Roberts): Is my hon. Friend aware of the report in *The Daily Telegraph* that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) has said that an assembly could cause income tax to vary by as much as 2p either way in Scotland and Wales?

Mr. Grist: I had not seen that report, but the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) arrives at an odd conclusion. I am not sure how he arrives at that figure of 2p in the pound. If a Welsh assembly had to raise its own funds, Welsh income tax would rise by much more than 2p. We might get back to 35p in the pound, which we had under the Labour party, and perhaps 98p on savings. I believe that Labour Members want to increase the tax on savings and return to the merry old days of the last Labour Government.

I wish that the Labour party would make clear its attitude to the Cardiff bay proposals. The barrage will put the final touches to the redevelopment of south Cardiff and to the whole city. It will transform Cardiff into one of the greatest cities in Europe. More than any action taken by the Government, it will cause the spotlight of fame to fall on south Wales. People will be drawn to south Wales to see the changes to the valleys, to see our good communications and to see the waterfront at Swansea and other places where great transformations have taken place. As yet, the Labour party has said nothing about whether it will continue the policy that we have espoused.

6.27 pm

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): I want to concentrate on housing, which did not play a prominent part in the Secretary of State's speech. Indeed, he spent most of the time—certainly the first quarter of an hour—discussing a subject that has not burnt in the breasts of the people of Gower since I have been in the House. Indeed, I cannot remember receiving one letter or telephone call about devolution. I should be interested to know how much correspondence other hon. Members have received on the subject. Perhaps I have completely missed what my constituents are concerned about, but so far as I am able to glean it is not devolution.

I wish to consider two documents which constitute a savage indictment of the Government's paralysis and complacency on the housing needs of the Welsh people. The first is a letter to me from Swansea city council, dated 10 February, informing me that the only single persons or childless couples who can be considered for a one or two-bedroom flat are current council house tenants requesting transfers. In other words, the city of Swansea has, in effect, closed its housing list to all except those who would be at risk on medical and social grounds and who could qualify for one offer of housing under the Housing Act 1985. The letter is in reply to a young couple's case of a type with which we are all too familiar.

When Mr. and Mrs. Thomas first planned their wedding, they put their names on the council waiting list. They were prepared for a wait, but when Mr. Thomas was offered a different local job with a tied cottage, he took it. They had a home of their own in which to start their married life, but they remained on the council list. That was five years ago. Mr. Thomas was made redundant and the couple were therefore made homeless. The council could not help and, in desperation, the couple put their furniture in relatives' sheds and spare rooms and moved in with Mr. Thomas's parents.

As Mrs. Thomas wrote to me, it was not that her parents-in-law were not nice, kind and understanding, but they had retired; they thought that they were free of parenthood and they wanted their house to themselves. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas both work but could never hope to buy a house on the Gower peninsula, where they were born and where they lived and worked. They have postponed having a family because they want a home first so as to provide a proper environment for their children's upbringing.

As Mrs. Thomas said, if they had acted irresponsibly and had had the two children they planned, they would be high on the council list. As it is, they have seen families who are considered to be a higher priority take the few houses and flats that have become vacant over the years. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas are typical of thousands of couples in Wales.

The Secretary of State's claims about increased prosperity in Wales are not borne out by any measure one cares to use. The reality for couples such as Mr. and Mrs.

[Mr. Gareth Wardell]

Thomas is entirely different. Gross domestic product per head in Wales is 28 per cent. lower than in the south-east of England. We have the lowest GDP per head of any region in Britain. When the Government came to power, pay levels for men and women workers in Wales were virtually the same as in England, but 13 years later Welsh male manual workers are the lowest paid in Britain and average male earnings overall in Wales have fallen by 8 per cent. compared with earnings in England. Similarly, female Welsh workers have gone from being the second highest paid in Britain to last but one in the pay league. Whichever way pay in Wales is analysed—by industrial sector, occupation or area—pay levels in comparison with England are extremely low and have become much worse during the 13 years of the Government's regime, leaving Wales firmly at the bottom of the British pay league.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas's joint pay is less than £180 per week. In 1990, 60 per cent. of council tenants in south Wales had a gross household income of less than £80 per week and 92 per cent. had less than £150 a week.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): As my hon. Friend said, Wales is the low pay region in Great Britain. I am sure that he will wish to condemn the Government's recent proposals to abolish wages councils, which fix minimum wages for one in eight workers in Wales in some of our biggest sectors such as retailing and catering. It is a scandalous proposal which shows that the Government are prepared to try to reduce unemployment by driving low wages even lower.

Mr. Wardell: I am grateful for that very helpful intervention. It reminds me very much of the argument used by the Victorian economist Nassau Senior who said that industrialists should drive down wages in order to increase profits. Fortunately, since then, more erudite and sensible economists have seen the great advantages in an economy of high wages. High wages frequently bring high productivity because people on low wages with a low standard of living are often unable to produce the goods and services necessary to bring us into the early years of the next century.

As unemployment levels have climbed to almost 10 per cent., poverty will grind down more families in Wales. The Government's mismanagement of the economy and their belated attempt to control a credit free-for-all created a price explosion in housing which caused 190,000 home owners to be dispossessed of their homes last year. Swansea city council's efforts to rehouse its share of those desperate families have finally nailed the hopes of couples such as Mr. and Mrs. Thomas for council housing in their home areas.

Despite lower average wage levels, widespread poverty and the number of house repossessions—all of which impress and reinforce the case for an increase in social, public and low-cost housing to rent—the Government refuse to recognise the problems facing thousands of Welsh couples and families. On the contrary, the Government regard their housing policy as a success because the number of people in Wales who own their own homes has increased from 62 per cent. in 1981 to 71 per cent. in 1990.

That is the background against which there has been a massive loss of public housing, which is still running at over 7,500 per year. Between March 1980 and March 1990, almost 90,000 homes in Wales were sold under the right-to-buy scheme. Funding for Welsh housing associations will allow only 3,500 new homes to be built this year. That represents an estimated annual shortfall of about 4,000 homes and does not take into account the 3,151 couples and families facing repossession orders in the Wales and Chester area courts.

I said that there was a second document that I wished to mention. It involves the advice that the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, which I am pleased to chair, received on 21 January this year about the Government's response to our report on housing in Wales. I wish to register my great disappointment with the Government's response, and I shall give three examples to illustrate some of the reasons for that disappointment.

As the Secretary of State said, I am sure that the Minister of State is taking copious notes and examining the document that he and his Department produced. Recommendation 10 refers to a review which we recommended that the Welsh Office carry out of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, to enable local authorities to establish trusts similar to the Winchester housing trust in England, which the Committee visited during its deliberations.

The Welsh Office response made the adviser and me wonder whether the Minister had read our report at all. We wondered, too, whether even the officials had read the report—certainly the Welsh Office response to that recommendation leaves a great deal to be desired. I hope that the Minister will read the relevant section of the report again and accept that what is good enough for Winchester is good enough for Wales.

It is not acceptable that, although the Government are prepared for English local authorities to take advantage of certain schemes, the Welsh Office is unhappy about Wales having the same facilities.

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): Does the hon. Gentleman —I almost called him my hon. Friend, which he certainly was in the Select Committee—agree thatmes what he has said about the Government's response to the Select Committee report simply emphasises the urgent need for Select Committee reports to be fully debated, and for the Government to be brought at least to the Welsh Grand Committee, if not to the Floor of the House—or, indeed, the floor of an assembly—to answer fully for their responses to Select Committee reports?

Mr. Wardell: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan), who has been a good ally in the work that we have done together in the Select Committee. I know that he will share my feelings, and those of other members of the Committee, about the great debates that we have had. On very few occasions did we manage to introduce such debates on the Floor of the House. In fact, I can think of only one such occasion—the debate on the Towyn floods. That debate had the great advantage of allowing us to show the people of Wales that we are extremely concerned when such events take place, but it illustrates what the hon. Member for Delyn said—that it takes an event such as the Towyn flood, and a Select Committee report on it, to bring about such a debate. I fully accept the hon. Gentleman's point, and I hope that the Government will move in the direction that he suggests.

In response to recommendation 9, the Welsh Office provides no justification for the fact that existing housing associations cannot do what trusts can do. I hope that the Government will reconsider that, and the evidence that we provided, which clearly shows that the Winchester housing trust can do things that Tai Cymru and the housing associations cannot do. I hope that the Minister replying to the debate will deal with that matter.

Recommendations 11 and 12 of the Select Committee report reflect the Committee's great anxiety about the continuing lax planning in Wales, but the Government's response shows that they do not share that anxiety. The Committee was so dissatisfied with the lack of Welsh Office monitoring of planning that we decided to send out to the chief planning officer of every district council in Wales a detailed questionnaire so as to establish a district-by-district index of lax planning.

The Welsh Select Committee has to do what the Welsh Office refuses to do. Unless it is done, there will be a continuation—even, perhaps, an increase—of what the Committee described in recommendation 12 of its report. We said that as

"councillors"—

we meant district councillors in particular—

"have suggested that developments should be permitted anywhere, it is extremely likely that there will be residual hope value near village settlements in many parts of Wales and land will not be offered at a very low price for local people."

It is a fundamental truth that the Welsh Office must begin to monitor closely what district councils throughout Wales are doing—they often flout their local plans, and the Welsh Office refuses to become involved. Indeed, I feel that the argument about a Welsh assembly misses the point about unitary authorities. The question is this: when authorities are merged, who will monitor the difference between local authorities with no local plans and those subject to county structure plans?

Recommendation 18 suggested that the Welsh Office establish and fund a Welsh rural housing trust, but the Welsh Office disagreed. The Secretary of State for the Environment is a Welshman. Indeed, he contested Gower in 1959, when his opponent was my predecessor. The right hon. Gentleman did not do too well then, but he has gone on to higher things since—or so I am told. The Secretary of State for the Environment wants England to continue with its own rural trusts. He does not want England to be subject to circular 30/86, which gives rich people almost a right to come into Wales and obtain planning permission to build houses in the open countryside. Such a right does not exist in England—only the Welsh have to put up with it.

That is another example of the fact that although the Secretary of State for the Environment, who says what can happen in England, allows rural housing trusts, which are making great, and successful, attempts to build affordable housing for young people, the Secretary of State for Wales is not prepared to give the Welsh the same facilities as the people of England. That is not fair. The Government obviously do not consider that what is good enough for England is good enough for Wales to have on the same basis.

Rural housing trusts are the sort of schemes for which small rural Welsh communities are desperate, but the Secretary of State has turned a deaf ear. Perhaps Tai Cymru has succeeded in bending his ear, and as a result has succeeded in preventing the initiative from coming through. To turn a deaf ear is the Secretary of State's privilege and the people of Wales's loss. But the time has now almost come—it will come next week, or the week after—when the people of Wales will turn a deaf ear to the Minister's claims that the Government have met Welsh housing needs. That will be the Minister's loss. He and his party will be voted out on their ear on 9 April.

6.48 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell), who has been the Chairman of the Welsh Select Committee throughout this Parliament. He has carried out his duties to the unqualified admiration of all Members of the Committee, and has shown an extraordinary assiduity in research and in marshalling facts. However, on this occasion I thought that some of the facts that he marshalled were excessively assiduous and a bit selective.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman how important it is that the hard work done by the Select Committee should be taken seriously by the Welsh Office, and that it should not be fobbed off with what could be described as pretty glib responses. I hope that what the hon. Gentleman has said will have struck home.

I am only too conscious that 12 months ago I said that I was making my last speech in a Welsh debate in this place. This time it really is the last time, and I promise not to do a Mr. Chips act. I shall look back over 13 years of Tory government in Wales and try to draw up a balance sheet from a standpoint slightly more detached than other hon. Members may be able to afford on the eve of a general election.

I will certainly not step so far out of character as to claim that everything that we have done has been good; nor will I claim that everything that the previous Labour Government did achieved nothing at all—or that the policies which Labour now advances are entirely misguided. I have never believed that my lot were 100 per cent. right and the other lot 100 per cent. wrong. Still less do I doubt the sincerity and good intentions of the Labour party, although I must remind the House that the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

What is more, I am ready to concede that the achievements of the past 13 years—the huge rise in personal living standards, the dramatic increase in home ownership, the modernisation of the Welsh economy—have been bought at a price. It has been a cruelly high price for thousands who have lost their jobs or who are now on short time, and for many hundreds of businesses and firms built up by a lifetime of hard work and thrift, which have been swept away, first by the harsh processes of industrial reconversion and then in the recession.

Society—for the avoidance of doubt, there is such a thing—carries an inescapable responsibility to the victims of change. I am hugely relieved that the Government, whom I am proud now to support, have not hesitated to acknowledge that responsibility. What is more, I have a horrible feeling that, although we may reasonably expect a revival of small businesses, the numbers of unemployed will not fall even when we move out of the recession.

In the past, experts always told us that technological change did not product lasting unemployment: new jobs

[Sir Anthony Meyer]

came along to replace the old ones. I am not sure that that is now true. Until now, we have been thinking in terms of white-collar jobs replacing manual jobs, but it is precisely in the office that the information technology revolution will bring the largest job losses. These changes have portentous consequences for the future of our society. I do not believe that any Government in any country or any political party in this country has any kind of an answer, nor do I believe that academic thinkers are much help in trying to find one.

Having planted those seeds of doubt—they are indeed dragons' teeth—let me now continue my retrospective. What would have happened if Labour had been in power these past 13 years? I do not go as far as to say that all the coal mines and all the steel works operating in 1979 would be operating today. Labour closed a large number of coal mines during its period of office, but it is certain that a Labour Government would have put off and put off the decisions, as they did with the closure of steelmaking at Shotton. It was left to their Conservative successors in 1979 to take those tough and unpopular closure decisions.

When I arrived in north Wales in 1970, the whole area was frighteningly dependent on steel and coal. The Labour Government had consistently refused to face up to the problems that arose from overcapacity in steel and from the wrong siting of some Welsh steel works. They refused to face the consequences of the growing exhaustion of accessible coal seams in Wales, and, more damagingly still, they tamely acquiesced in the refusal of the Scargill-led National Union of Mineworkers to contemplate working methods which might have given a reprieve to some coal mines and which would, still more, have enabled other more profitable pits to be opened up.

In this as in other industries, Labour's record in opposition has been one of fighting to the death to preserve the sunset industries and the jobs that go with them. That is not necessarily an ignoble strategy, but it is one that would have hindered the emergence of the far healthier mixed industrial economy which can be seen today in Deeside, Wrexham, all around Cardiff, Newport and Swansea.

Whatever the solution to structural unemployment may be, one thing is quite certain: only a wealth-creating economy can possibly provide the necessary conditions for that solution, and that wealth-creating economy cannot be sustained by obsolescent industry. Any hon. Member who doubts that should go to eastern Europe and look.

Then there is the other huge consideration of Labour policy towards the European Community. I am delighted that the Labour party has now recognised this new elephant sitting on its doorstep, to use the picturesque phrase of the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), but there is no getting away from the fact that, if Labour had won the election of 1983 under the leadership of the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) or that of 1987 under the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), Britain would now be outside the European Community—and once out we could not have got in again except on our knees.

What then would have happened to all the inward investment which not only provides so many tens of thousands of jobs but which has done so much to raise standards of management in Wales? The old xenophobic prejudices still lurk below the surface of the Labour party—I can almost sense the presence of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) in his seat. Perhaps a future Labour Government would no longer threaten to take Britain out of the European Community, but potential inward investors would not feel the same comfortable certainty that investment in Wales guaranteed open access to the whole single market of the European Community.

It is all very well for Liberal Democrats to promise just about everything to everybody—or rather, everything that the opinion polls show people want—because they will never have to deliver, but it is disturbing to see how far the Labour party is going in the direction of finger-in-the-wind politics.

To take a trivial but revealing instance, opinion polls show that the abolition of fox hunting would be a vote winner. Personally, I think that hunting and killing animals for pleasure is a nasty business and that some so-called sports, such as hare coursing, constitute real unjustifiable cruelty and should be outlawed forthwith. I cannot be persuaded, however, that hunting foxes with hounds is a crueller way of killing an extremely cruel predator than shooting, which as often as not leaves a wounded animal to crawl away to a slow and painful death.

But that is not the point. The point is that the Labour party, which as a party has never shown that animal welfare is right at the top of its priorities, has suddenly scented a possible electoral quarry. By preventing a minority from enjoying something that they very much enjoy doing, the Labour party hopes to win votes from the majority, guided thereto by obliging opinion polls. I find that pretty squalid.

Then there is education. It was a Labour Secretary of State, Mrs. Shirley Williams, who gave us comprehensive education, and a mixed blessing it has turned out to be. Of course there are some excellent comprehensive schools—I have some outstanding ones in my constituency—but variety of educational provision is worth preserving. It is not to be lightly cast aside—all the less so when there is so little of it left.

Labour's pledge to abolish the remaining direct grant schools and to bleed the independent schools to death by abolishing the assisted places scheme may satisfy the envious instincts of an electoral majority, but the money saved by abolishing the assisted places scheme will have no discernible effect on total provision for maintained schools. It will do nothing to improve standards of education, which benefit immensely from what little choice and competition has been left by the rush to mass comprehensivisation.

What would a Labour Government have meant—what would a Labour Government mean—for the health service? It would have meant quite simply a refusal to accept the changes—necessary, even if they were at first unpopular—that would enable the national health service to survive the pressure of ever-mounting demands created by its own success. I am glad to say that the Labour party has picked a loser, and that serves Labour right. The Government have stuck to their guns over hospital trusts and budget-holding practices. There is increasing evidence that the changes are working well and are popular.

Finally, we must consider devolution, which we may or may not be debating in the Welsh Grand Committee in Cardiff, depending on whether the Labour party has the stomach for it. As those hon. Members who are members

of Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats are aware, my views on devolution are not far removed from theirs. I am quite happy with the idea of an independent Wales as a full member of the European Community on fully federal lines with strict regard for the principles of subsidiarity—but eventually. I do not believe that the time for such a radical change has come, and it probably will not come this decade.

I am reminded of the former French Prime Minister, Mr. Rocard, who went to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) when she was Prime Minister. When he emerged, he said that he was glad to say that his views and hers on European integration were virtually identical. He had asked her when she thought that there would be a united states of Europe, and she had said, not in 1,000 years. Mr. Rocard said that there would be one within five years. He then said, "As you can see, the difference is merely one of timing."

Whatever the opinion polls may say, I remain totally unconvinced that public opinion in Wales is really ready yet to pay the price of devolution. That price involves inevitably higher taxes of one sort or another, not just to run the assembly. If there is to be an assembly, it must have revenue-raising powers. There is a price also in terms of disincentives to inward investors, who may fear that devolution might impose new burdens and fresh complications on them. Above all, there is a price in terms of the loss, or at the very best the downgrading, of the Secretary of State for Wales, who, in this Conservative Government, has been such an outstanding success in getting for Wales far more than its due share of inward investment and central Government funds—for example, by way of revenue support grant.

Until I am satisfied that the people of Wales regard an elected assembly as something more than a status symbol, I shall support the cautious approach of the Secretary of State and his advisory council. In this, as in so many other matters, I have great faith in the judgment of my right hon. Friend. He has shown a quite extraordinary sensitivity to Welsh feelings and aspirations, and a startling ability to fight his corner for Wales in the Cabinet. I can hardly suppose that he will remain in his job after the election: he is clearly destined for higher things. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about Scotland?"] That might be a good idea. My right hon. Friend will be a very hard act to follow, perhaps even harder than his predecessor. I believe that, in their secret hearts, all hon. Members, in all parties, wish him well.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I remind the House that we are now in the period in which the Standing Order applies.

7.2 pm

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): It is a real pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer). He has not lost his diplomat's statistical panache, as was clear when he referred to the French, and we will miss him greatly when he leaves this place. I do not entirely agree with what he said about some of the things that the Welsh Office has been up to, but there are two sides to the House and we hold different views about such things.

I thank the Secretary of State for his announcement about the Welsh language Bill. That Bill is long overdue, and I wonder why the Minister of State did not contrive to introduce such a Bill earlier in this Parliament. However, I hope that it will become an Act soon. At least all four parties in Wales now have a commitment to a Welsh language Act in their manifestos for the general election, and that is how it should be.

The tone of the Secretary of State's speech was one of impartial self-congratulation. When we analyse cruelly what has happened in Wales over the past 12 months or so, we should consider the matter more analytically than was the case in the public relations exercise conducted by the Secretary of State.

The Chairman of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell), was right to highlight the problem of housing in Wales. In a reply to a parliamentary question that I asked within the past 10 days, it has emerged that about 3,500 council houses were completed in Wales in 1979. It also emerged that only 380 council houses were completed in 1991. It is all very well for Ministers to claim that 3,500 houses are being completed through Tai Cymru—Housing for Wales—but many of those houses are unaffordable. Council houses are at least affordable in terms of average Welsh earnings, which, as we have already heard, are the lowest in the mainland United Kingdom. However, the rents of many housing association houses are unaffordable. Such rents are often between £45 and £50 a week, and they can comprise 40 per cent. of the incomes of people working in relatively low-paid jobs in Wales.

I am sad to say that some housing association houses in my constituency are unoccupied because local people cannot afford the rents. That shows that housing association grants are not generous enough. I hope that the Minister will accept that those housing association houses need more generous housing association grants so that the people of Wales can afford to live in them.

Within the past week, I asked a parliamentary question about homelessness in Wales. I was told that 14,402 people were classified as homeless in Wales in 1987. However, by 1991, there were 23,694. That is an increase of 9,000 within the past four years. That is unacceptable. Indeed, an additional 3,000 people came on to the homeless list in 1991.

I feel particularly strongly about unemployment. It seems to have returned to the state that it was in the 1930s, when my father was unemployed for four years. He was born and brought up in Brecon, but left to travel the seas of the world as a master mariner. The only job he could find in the 1930s was as captain of a dredger in the Gulf. Within six months of obtaining that job, he was dead. My mother lost my father when I was three. She had to return to work, and we had a very tough time.

The barren policies of the 1930s have returned. People cannot find work. There are 128,000 people out of work in Wales today—an increase of 27,000 since the start of 1991. That is not a record of which to be proud. One third of the unemployed are aged between 18 and 25. That is astounding. What future do the young people of Wales have when 43,000 of them are out of work? We must all be concerned about that, no matter which political party we represent in the House.

The situation in the countryside is not good. Farm incomes, in real terms, are at their lowest levels since the second world war. There has been a minor rally in the past

[Mr. Richard Livsey]

12 months—an increase of 15 per cent.—but in the previous year we saw drops of 21 per cent. in dairy farming incomes and 25 per cent. in hill farming incomes. Many farms are going bankrupt. We cannot accept that.

In the United Kingdom, 1,000 agricultural jobs are being shed every month. Fifty farmers a week leave the land. That has been happening since 1980. We know from research carried out at the university in Aberystwyth that 15,000 people in Wales are expected to leave the land in the next five years. That is not satisfactory. I wonder whether the Government have an adequate agricultural policy to tackle those problems. Also, 4,112 businesses in Wales have gone into receivership in the past 12 months and 2,000 people have become bankrupt. That is a 92 per cent. increase over the previous year. Mortgage repossessions have already been mentioned.

There is tremendous pressure for an announcement before the election on the reorganisation of local government in Wales. I counsel the Government to take a longer and harder look at that matter, whatever the colour of the Government after the general election. Such a decision cannot be taken rapidly. I cannot understand why there is no independent commission to make recommendations to the Government of the day, based on an objective assessment of the needs of local government in Wales. If we are to have unitary authorities, they should be allied to a Welsh assembly. To have unitary authorities without a Welsh assembly does not add up to a logical policy.

The danger is that we could have many small unitary authorities being exploited by the Government of the day because they will not be strong, whereas, if there were a Welsh assembly, we could have a proper structure and a proper strategic body which could democratically allocate and sort out priorities. In local government, we need democracy and we need accountability from democracy. The cost implications also must be taken into account.

We in Wales live in a wonderful country. The people are friendly—probably the most friendly people in the United Kingdom. They have wit, humour, imagination and inventiveness in the workplace.

I congratulate the Secretary of State and the Welsh Office on setting up in Brussels an office for Wales in the past week. That was long overdue, but it shows the way that Wales is going in its relationships with the European Community. Wales will become more important in those relationships. We need to look with imagination to the future for Wales. I believe that it is optimistic if the people are given the reins of more power to exercise their undoubted abilities.

7.13 pm

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I take this opportunity to bring to the attention of all Welsh Members a problem that has arisen recently and affects us all. It relates to one of the long-standing Welsh economic success stories—the banana trade between Wales and the eastern Caribbean islands, the Windward islands. I have spoken on the subject on a number of occasions. Until recently, we thought that we had achieved considerable success in persuading the Government that certain steps should be taken to secure preferential access for Afro-Caribbean and Pacific bananas into not only the United Kingdom market but the European market. Until 20 December 1991, we thought that we were well on course in achieving that.

The Government produced a paper in March 1990, setting down proposals for dealing with our former colonial suppliers under the single European market. That working paper was unacceptable and the Government withdrew it. I believe that Ministers agreed that a new formula had to be found to guarantee the supply of bananas from the Windward islands in particular and from Afro-Caribbean and Pacific countries into Europe. They were moving toward a formula that would guarantee a quota on fruit coming into the European Community, a tariff on the price from major competitors in central and south America, and the ability of suppliers to get licences also to deal in fruit from central and south America.

In December, the Secretary-General of the general agreement on tariffs and trade organisation, Mr. Dunkel, produced a paper which he thought would offer a resolution to the Uruguay round of the GATT talks which would satisfy everybody. To my horror and to the horror of many hon. Members, he suggested that the banana should be included for the first time—it was never mentioned before—in the GATT round of talks, which completely cut across the steps that we had taken, in the right direction, in protecting those markets.

What are the consequences of our failing to find a solution that protects the traditional market for Wales? The port of Barry in my constituency is the home of Geest Banana Co. That prestigious and successful company imports 55 per cent. or therabouts of all the bananas that come into the United Kingdom. We are major banana consumers. In fact, we consume almost 500,000 tonnes of bananas a year. On average, every man, woman and child in the United Kingdom eats a banana once a week. One can do some quite marvellous things with bananas.

Only last night, I had the pleasure of going to a small but excellent restaurant in Waterloo, called South of the Border, and ate a Bali banana, which was a banana baked in pastry and served as an entrée—absolutely wonderful. It is a beautiful fruit; it is part of our staple diet.

If we do not find a solution to the problem, Geest may no longer be able to operate from the port of Barry and may no longer remain the biggest importer of that fruit from the Windward islands. For Wales it will mean the loss of a substantial number of jobs—approximately 300 direct and indirect jobs. It will also mean the loss of a very successful company, the Barry Stevedores Co., which was set up two years ago. It is one of the most successful co-operatives and it depends on that trade. It will also mean a loss of prestige. When the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) was Lord President of the Council, he fondly recalled seeing the great banana boats going in and out of Barry bay. We may never see them again. That would be tragic not just for me, because it is my constituency, but for all hon. Members, because of that great Welsh tradition.

That trade has provided an historic link with the Windward islands. They are almost entirely dependent on the banana trade not only for their economic survival but for their social survival. If they lose access to the United Kingdom markets, it is almost certain that political chaos will reign in those countries, as they depend on the income from banana exports, which ranges from about 35 per cent. of the income of the smaller eastern Caribbean islands to 55 per cent. That could be lost overnight.

I discovered another disturbing feature when I recently had the opportunity to visit the islands and speak to the political leaders about their anxiety at the failure to reach an agreement for 1 January 1993, when the single European market comes into force. It took me by surprise. Until now, we have believed, and in speeches made in the House it has been pointed out, that if the Windward islands and other eastern Caribbean islands could not produce a legitimate cash crop of bananas, there is a danger that they might turn to producing illegal crops. On a weekly basis they have paid for 50,000 producers who own small plots of land. The danger is that they might start to grow ganja and export it to Europe and north America to substitute for a legitimate income.

The position is worse than that. The greatest fear is not that ganja will be grown and exported from the islands. The greater fear is that cocaine will be taken from Venezuela and Colombia to the islands, which will be used as trans-shipment areas for the European and north American drug markets. Dame Eugenia Charles told me, "The Europeans face a choice. They either continue to buy our bananas or their children may well buy cocaine that comes through these islands." We need to bear that in mind when considering the implications of our trade arrangements.

We also have a moral obligation to the Windward islands. I was delighted to extend civic and cultural links between Wales and the eastern Caribbean when I visited the islands. We should remember that the islands were former colonies of Britain. We encouraged them to produce bananas from the 1950s onwards. To that extent, we made them dependent on that fruit and, for many years, we benefited.

It is possible to buy bananas much more cheaply from the big multinationals such as Chiquita. Such bananas are grown on massive plantations on the large plains of central and south America. Cheap and sometimes slave labour is used to produce those bananas. The multinationals dominate the world market. So those of us who believe that, where appropriate, competition is a good thing see that if the multinationals are allowed to dominate the European market, which is the second largest in the world, there will be no competition whatever. The fruit from the West Indies is a different type of fruit. Its quality is superior to the bland and starchy, large, uniform in size and always unnatural in colour dollar banana, as it is called.

I wish to draw to the notice of the House the reason why I am so worried. All the other countries in the European Community—they have various arrangements and we must find a standard and universal formula—have agreed to object to including bananas in the Dunkel text in the GATT round. France, Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain have objected. The only country that has not done so is the United Kingdom. I ask the Secretary of State to consider speaking to his colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and to plead with them to insist that the banana is taken out of GATT.

7.23 pm

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): I agree with what the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) said. In Cardiff we all know the importance of Geest. One of my good supporters is a master mariner, Captain Clive Jenkins. We have been in correspondence recently. I endorse what the hon. Gentleman said to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I hope that an appropriate solution will be found to maintain the important banana trade through the port of Barry.

I was delighted to have the opportunity to listen to what may have been the last speech in Parliament of my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer). I have always listened with interest to his speeches. They are a touch cynical, well considered and most compassionate. I often fancy that it is a pity that his talents were not better recognised and that at least some of his years were not spent on the Treasury Bench rather than the Back Bench. Had he been one of our Welsh Office Ministers during the past 13 years, our progress in Wales would have been more interesting and, I am sure, enriched.

I started my day this morning by listening to the radio. I was saddened to hear that our local councils in Wales have the worst record on community charge increases this year. From a study by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, I understand that councils are increasing the community charge by 11 per cent. in England, by more in Scotland, and by an average of 24 per cent. in Wales.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Will the hon. Gentleman be precise? The study did not say that the Welsh result was the worst. It said that it was the highest, and it blamed the Government for that.

Mr. Jones: I leave the hon. Gentleman to develop his own argument, if he can, on that one.

Welsh local councils have produced the worst increases in the community charge. Perhaps we have been fooling ourselves by saying that, with only one or two exceptions, we have more moderate councils in Wales and that the most extreme left-wing councils are in England. An increase in community charges twice as bad as that in England suggests that that is wrong.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State certainly must maintain his capping powers to deal with local councils in Wales, for that is the last defence of the people of Wales against an extreme council. I know that it will not come to pass, but I am appalled at the prospect that if a Labour Government were elected, they would scrap the capping powers. My constituents in Cardiff, North would probably see the community charge double within weeks. South Glamorgan council, which is acknowledged as the most left-wing in Wales, has already published its intention to spend an extra £25 million over and above that which has already been agreed under the standard spending assessment.

Since we had our last St. David's day debate, VAT has been increased by 2·5 per cent. That has mitigated the community charge, especially in Wales. It is my personal preference that a greater contribution should be made by VAT. That is fairer as it is linked with ability to pay far more than mere possession of a house is.

I understand those who point out that the Government provide 93 per cent. of the spending by local councils in Wales. I understand when people in Wales say that it might be time to scrap the last 7 per cent. so that all spending by local councils is financed by the Treasury. That would be regrettable, but if it came to pass the councils would have only themselves to blame.

[Mr. Jones]

Happily, the reform of the financing of local councils has been resolved. As the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) said, there are now great expectations in Wales for the reform of the structure of local councils. There is little love for large, remote councils. I was most interested to receive from the Welsh Counties Committee this week a document costing the administration of councils. It said that when authorities in Wales reach a size of 50,000 in population terms there is little difference in the cost of administering those councils.

In the same document, anxiety is expressed that if we had smaller councils some of them might have to rely to an extent on joint services. I have it on the authority of the chief executive of Cardiff city council, who has put this into perspective, that an average council in Wales employing a staff of 1,300 would need to have only 20 staff contracted or engaged in joint functions. Of course, that does not apply to Cardiff, the capital city of Wales. I shall not pursue my wish to see the capital city expand. That is a consideration for the future. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has to consider all the representations that he has received about local councils in Wales, but I look forward to the earliest pronouncement from him. I want to see Cardiff made into a real capital again. I want it once more to be an independent capital city of Wales without an artificial tier of local government above it. To me, that is real devolution in Wales.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was too diplomatic. I shall pursue his argument as to why the Labour party is scared to face devolution. Why can we not have a Welsh Grand Committee in the capital city of Wales? That would be the right place to hold such an important debate, and I claim credit for suggesting that at the last sitting of the Committee. Indeed, I have gone further than that and approached the Lord Mayor of Cardiff. The city hall is available, and it would be a perfect place to stage the debate.

Mr. Win Griffiths: On what date?

Mr. Jones: On more than one day, but if that does not suit the Labour party I have an alternative. I spoke to the managing director of HTV and suggested a television debate so that the people of Wales could watch it, and he readily agreed to host such a debate. That is another opportunity, if only Labour were not scared of facing it. I was pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State suggested that the Leader of the Opposition should answer the debate. Clearly, the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) is ducking and dodging the issue.

I suggest that my right hon. Friend should go a stage further. I know that the matter was touched on in business questions today, but let us put a motion on the Order Paper to enable a sitting of the Welsh Grand Committee. Let my right hon. Friend take the initiative. Let us call Labour's bluff. If the Labour party stopped the motion going through, the matter would be resolved. The people of Wales would realise that the Labour party is stopping us having that debate.

The city of Cardiff is very much a city of enterprise. That is how it was built. It was once the second busiest port in the world, and the busiest coal port. Sadly, that was in its heyday and is no longer the case. However, we have exciting plans to redevelop the south of Cardiff.

Mr. John P. Smith *rose*——

Mr. Jones: I cannot give way as I am under a time constraint.

The Cardiff bay barrage would totally transform our city. It would be a major environmental improvement and also an important flood defence. It would recoup the investment involved and generate up to 30,000 new jobs. It is a wonderful example of team work. Under the leadership of the Welsh Office, all political parties in Cardiff are happy for the scheme to progress. I understand that the Labour party has produced a new statement of its policies for Wales—it may have been entitled "Opportunity Wales"—but that this contained no mention of Cardiff bay and the redevelopment. How could that have been left out? It is too great an opportunity to be omitted by any responsible political party. I fear that there is only one reason: Labour is moving towards total opposition to the redevelopment of south Cardiff. If so, at the very least Opposition Members should be honest and say so. They will pay dearly in Cardiff if they do not continue to be positive supporters of those most exciting plans, which will benefit not only Cardiff but a wider area of south Wales. That is the positive way forward for our capital city and for the rest of Wales.

I am disappointed. All that I have heard from the Opposition today has been doom and gloom. The shadow Secretary of State made one pronouncement—that he would imitate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in introducing a Welsh language Bill. What agenda was he offering the people of Wales when he knows that there will be an election within a few short weeks? He can offer no alternative—or rather, I know the alternative: high tax, high interest rates, and high inflation. That is what the people of Wales would pay if we took that alternative. It would mean 19 per cent. more taxation on those who create jobs in Wales. As if that were not enough, it would also mean £20 more taxation a week on the average family and 9 per cent. more on savings. Up would go mortgages and inflation.

The alternative being offered to the people of Wales by the Opposition is like the Bourbons of France: they learn nothing and they forget nothing. I conclude by paraphrasing Oscar Wilde: it is the unelectable offering us the unendurable.

7.33 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South-West): My area is suffering from the Government-created recession in the same way that many other hon. Members have outlined —with factory closures, homelessness, decaying schools and public transport cuts.

As a large part of my area is rural, many of the effects of the slump are hidden. Rural areas depend largely on farming for their culture and viability and it needs to be at least marginally profitable. As we have heard from other hon. Members, there is a crisis in farming. Farm incomes are at their lowest level in real terms since the second world war. Every month, 1,000 jobs in agriculture are being shed. More than 50 farmers a week have been leaving the land since 1980.

On top of the severe cuts in agricultural support, British farmers have had to cope with high United Kingdom interest rates, damaging food scares and UK regulations which are especially stringent and which have put British

farmers at a disadvantage compared with their continental neighbours. The level of farm debt is £7·4 billion, which is twice the level of 1981.

Uncertainty about the future is undermining many farmers, and in the present policy climate it is virtually impossible to plan ahead. We must acknowledge that farming needs at least five years of stability to plan for the future.

Investment is falling, and young people are leaving the industry. Although the number of people directly employed in agriculture has been falling, farming provides the backbone of the rural economy in my area. In addition to farmers, farm workers and their families, people are also employed in related service and supply trades, and all of them depend on a healthy farming industry for their livelihood. If farming is allowed to deteriorate any further in rural areas, the effects will be felt far beyond the farm gate.

As time is short, I must turn to another important subject, and I hope that the Minister will be able to give me some news tonight. Although rural areas have problems, it is still a joy to represent a beautiful part of the beautiful country of Wales, and to represent Llangollen, which is a beautiful town and has the distinction of being the base for the international Eisteddfod. I have the dubious distinction of being as old as the Eisteddfod, since it started in 1947.

Thanks to Clwyd county council being successful in obtaining project of regional and national importance—PRNI—approval for a permanent pavilion on that site, we have a unique opportunity to produce something which will benefit Wales and the world. The Eisteddfod is a wonderful institution which has had effects throughout the world for the past 45 years.

Mr. David Hunt *indicated assent.*

Mr. Jones: It should be encouraged, and I know that the Secretary of State agrees, as I see him nodding.

I am sure that he is aware that, in addition to the PRNI approval for £2·1 million to build the pavilion, the Friends of Llangollen have raised about £500,000, which is a tremendous feat at a time when many people are suffering from compassion fatigue from all kinds of worthy projects. In addition to the £500,000, there has been support from Glyndwr and the Wales tourist board. The total project cost has been taken to £3·1 million.

The project has also benefited from a grant from the European Community to the value of £1 million towards the cost. Until now, that was the maximum that could be spent on the development. However I have been told that, since 1 January, there are new rules. I hope that that means that we can obtain European development funding for the money that the Friends of Llangollen have raised. There is a slight problem and I hope that the Minister will be able to help.

Mr. David Hunt: I must tell the hon. Gentleman that Clwyd county council has not formally approached my Department, but our respective officials have discussed the matter and perceive no difficulties at all.

Mr. Jones: I am delighted, and I thank the Secretary of State for that response.

Mr. Win Griffiths: There is soon to be an election.

Mr. Jones: I shall not endorse the churlish comments that my hon. Friend is making, no matter what I think.

I am delighted to hear that assurance from the Secretary of State and thank him whole-heartedly, but it has destroyed the rest of my speech. However, I shall carry on regardless, because it is worth explaining how such private funding can attract money from Europe. In itself, that is a good thing. I take it that the Secretary of State will agree to the possibility of transferring some capital allowance to cover the 12 months before we receive the money from Europe.

Clwyd county council is supporting another project delayed under the PRNI rules. At St. Asaph business park, there has been financial slippage and, although the county council has not applied, I understand that the Secretary of State would consider that application favourably. That would be wonderful as it would allow the pavilion to be brought up to standard while the contractors are on site. It is a genuine project of regional, national, and probably international importance. It will serve the people of Wales and the world for a long time to come.

I look forward to July, when I hope to visit the site as, I fondly hope, the Member of Parliament for that constituency. I want to see the project come to fruition, with all the necessary seating, toilet facilities and groundworks, which have not been done until now. It will be a fitting setting for the Llangollen Eisteddfod and for the music and the international camaraderie that that engenders. The people of the world will see that Wales can put such a project together. It will be a setting for the Eisteddfod for the next 45 years and I hope to be able to go there on my birthday in 45 years' time. In fact, I may even make the centenary.

I thank the Secretary of State once again for destroying my speech and giving Clwyd county council the ability to complete a worthwhile project.

7.43 pm

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): Given what the Secretary of State offered to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones), if he is prepared to grant assisted area status to Monmouth immediately, I shall not continue my speech.

Mr. David Hunt *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Edwards: Clearly, the Secretary of State will not do that. Therefore, I shall continue with my speech.

It is a privilege to contribute to the debate on Wales, which traditionally takes place on or near St. David's day. I have attended and have read the *Hansard* reports of those debates for a number of years, and it is a privilege to take part this year.

I represent a constituency that, historically, was not alway a part of Wales and it is one of the most anglicised areas of Wales. I noted what the Secretary of State said about the introduction of a Welsh language Bill and I welcome that. I am sure that he will also welcome the proposal to introduce a Welsh medium school in Abergavenny, which I hope will be implemented in the next year or so. The Secretary of State has acknowledged that, in my constituency, there is some anxiety about Welsh appearing in the national curriculum. I wish to convey those anxieties.

[Mr. Edwards]

I hope that it is possible to attract, naturally, Welsh-speaking teachers to Gwent to involve them in the implementation of the language programme there.

Issues relating to the economy, the environment and public services are causing great concern in my constituency. I cannot deny that, traditionally, Monmouth has been one of the more affluent areas of Wales, but, in common with many other areas, it has been hit by the recession. I have had meetings with the Abergavenny chamber of trade and the Monmouth chamber of commerce and I have heard business people express their anxieties about the recession. It is a tremendous disappointment to come across people who thought they were enjoying an economic miracle two or three years ago who now face bankruptcy or have already gone bankrupt. Such bankruptcies also cause family problems and homelessness often goes with it.

The matter of assisted area status for Monmouth has caused some controversy and I have been disappointed by some recent developments. A delegation, of which I was a member, was to meet the Secretary of State to put the strong case for assisted area status. However, Monmouth borough council received a letter from the private secretary to the Secretary of State to the effect that, as Monmouth was not going to get assisted area status, there was absolutely no point in the Secretary of State meeting that delegation. Subsequently, another announcement was made to the effect that the Secretary of State was prepared to meet a delegation that was to include the Conservative candidate for Monmouth. If this meeting produces assisted area status for Monmouth before the next election, I would be the first to congratulate the Secretary of State, but I doubt whether that will happen. The delegation, which is supposed to meet the Secretary of State on Monday, is disintegrating before it is even assembled. Gwent county council and Monmouth chamber of commerce have decided not to participate and I doubt whether Monmouth town council will participate. They realise that it is nothing but a political stunt. They are totally unimpressed because they can see it for what it is.

My constituents are also anxious about threats to the local environment. My constituency covers 300 sq miles encompassing part of the south Wales coalfield right down to the Severn bridge. It is one of the most beautiful areas of Wales. There is also beauty in the bleakness—for example, up near Blaenavon and Pwll Du—but opencast developments pose a serious environmental threat to those areas. I have visited other opencast developments in south Wales at Nant Helen near Glynneath and I do not want such devastation to be visited upon Abergavenny. I hope that the Secretary of State will take note of the considerable objection to the Pwll Du development and listen to the people of Clydach and Llanelly Hill who are totally opposed to it.

At the other end of my constituency is the Wye valley, which is one of the five designated areas of outstanding natural beauty in Wales. There is much concern about proposed developments in that area, which are contrary to not only the Gwent structure plan but the intention of Parliament, which was to give special protection to the area. It is a matter of great anxiety that a precedent could be set by insensitive developments in the Wye valley. Such developments could also then take place in the other areas of outstanding natural beauty, the Anglesey coast, Llŷn, the Clwydian range and the Gower peninsula. There is considerable concern about any infringements in those areas.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) has announced that the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs is undertaking an inquiry into planning. There is widespread concern in my constituency about the whole planning process, much of which was revealed in an HTV documentary shortly before Christmas. The programme revealed the inconsistency, inequity and possible illegality in some of the planning applications and approvals that have been given and the way in which planning recommendations are overturned at a political whim. I am delighted that the Select Committee, of which I am a member, is undertaking that inquiry.

Wales has had a high tradition of good quality public services. The public sector in my constituency, as in many others, is by far the biggest employer, yet much of the public sector has been undermined by Conservative policies in the past 13 years.

I have spoken in the House before about the controversies affecting Nevill Hall hospital, but I will restrict my comments on that issue today to the proposal to introduce car parking charges. That proposal has absolutely outraged the people of Abergavenny and all who travel from the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot)—many members of staff as well as patients come from his area to Nevill Hall—and elsewhere to the hospital.

The staff, patients, visitors and volunteers who give up their time to work in the hospital are outraged by the proposal. They say that the imposition of parking charges would infringe the principle of a free national health service. They see no support for the idea in the patients charter and they are bitterly opposed to it. They hope that such charges will not be implemented at Nevill Hall or any other hospital in Wales.

I have spoken before in the House about the housing crisis in Wales. I have said previously that £741 million has accrued from the sale of council houses in district authorities in Wales in the past 10 years and that it is a public scandal. I think I see the Under-Secretary shaking his head in dissent. Not only has that money not been devoted to the provision of housing, but even parliamentary answers have not explained what has happened to that money.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The sum of £741 million represents total receipts over the past 10 years. Most of that money has been spent by local authorities in credit approvals for local government expenditure on all sorts of capital projects. I have made it clear at Question Time in response to the hon. Gentleman that local authorities can use 25 per cent. for housing and the other 75 per cent. for capital redemption against credit approvals. If he does not understand that, he should not be in the House.

Mr. Edwards: Redeeming debt is not as high a priority as housing homeless people, and there is a growing crisis of homeless people in all our constituencies. If the Minister does not believe that, he should have been with me a few days ago when I went around the Rother estate in Abergavenny. The people in those council houses are appalled at the idea of there being no prospect of their

children finding local authority housing. There is nothing that they can buy in the private market and very little for them to rent in the housing association sector.

My constituency comprises many people of moderate means. They appreciate what has happened in the past 12 years, which is why last May they elected a Labour Member. I am confident that I shall have the privilege of representing them after the next general election.

7.53 pm

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): The Welsh day debate is the highlight of the parliamentary year for the Principality. It is one of the far too few occasions when Welsh matters can be debated on the Floor of the House. That is yet a further strong argument why we need another debating forum for Welsh affairs. We need one not just as an all-Wales strategic tier on top of the unitary authorities, which I hope we will shortly have, but because there is such inadequate debate of Welsh matters in this House—far more inadequate than the debate of Scottish issues.

I wish to look beyond the dying embers of this Parliament to the issues that will dominate the next Parliament. As I shall not be a Member of it, I thought that I would have my say now. Two related issues are likely to dominate that Parliament. The first is the ever closer union of Europe, political and economic, and the second is constitutional change in the United Kingdom. Both are inevitable. Foolish men may try to resist the tide of history, but ultimately it will overwhelm them.

I am a committed, indeed passionate, European who is strongly in favour of further European integration. Those opposed to European unity tend to use the one word "sovereignty" as their ammunition. They seldom define what they mean by it. In the dictionary or thesaurus sense, sovereignty as

"supreme and independent power, free from external control",

no longer exists.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), by taking us into the EEC in 1973, conceded sovereignty. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher)—perhaps she would not care to remember it now as one of the most illustrious achievements of her distinguished career—agreed to the single market in 1985, she did the same and ceded further sovereignty. The present Prime Minister, in his former incarnation as Chancellor of the Exchequer, by joining the exchange rate mechanism in 1991, merged our sovereignty with that of our European partners by tying sterling more closely to their currencies.

Sovereignty is not a symbol to be worshipped from afar, an indissoluble whole which can only be preserved intact. It is a commodity to be bartered, ceded, pooled and shared in the interests of the people, for their economic benefit and well-being. There is no realism in speaking of sovereignty as sacrosanct when our interest rates are directly affected—some might even say dictated—by the Bundesbank, and when our economic affairs are so strongly influenced by German wage claims and the cost of German unification.

I believe that sovereignty will come back to us with a single currency. At least we shall have a seat on the board of a European central bank. No wonder the Bundesbank —my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley too casually ignores this—is so guarded about monetary union. It foresees a loss of power and sovereignty.

I contend that there is no fear among the Welsh people at a loss of sovereignty in the cause of European union. Indeed, long ago the people of Wales largely lost sovereignty to Whitehall and Westminster, and I tend to agree with them that it might be better to lose it even further afield—further afield geographically—but to a place that is more sensitive to their needs and aspirations.

We in Wales see ever-closer union with Europe not as a threat but as an opportunity. It will give us a chance to come out of the shadow of our larger neighbour and vigorously to reassert our own identity within a Europe of the regions. Wales within Europe, just like Scotland within Europe—those concepts have an understandable appeal. The Government must recognise that appeal and respond to it.

On the European issue, my party is still resisting the tide of history, though less fiercely than it did before. It is also still out of tune, though less than previously under my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley, with the mood of the moment. We say that our place is at the heart of Europe, yet we have not learnt the lesson of our delayed entry. We should be in the vanguard, but we are still in the rear. We are still dragging our feet.

It is a matter of great sadness to many of our European partners—I was speaking yesterday to some distinguished representatives of Spain—that we are not in the vanguard. They want us to be fully committed to, enthusiastic and wholehearted about, the Community—right at the heart of it—not just saying we are there but effectively acting there to counterbalance the increasing power of a resurgent Germany.

The European and constitutional issues are closely related. There is a delicious irony in the fact that the British Government, in the European context, is fiercely fighting against the centralisation of power in Brussels, while in the United Kingdom context they are determined to retain power in the centre, here in Whitehall and at Westminster. Britain is the largest unitary state in the world, apart from Japan. It is extremely centralised, even more so than France in practice. But we have already modified the supremacy of Parliament to accommodate the upward flow of power to Brussels. Why can we not also modify it in the opposite direction, by devolving power downwards? Indeed, devolution could offer the opportunity of an effective counterbalance to centralised decision-making in Brussels.

The principle of subsidiarity, to which we are committed at the European level, is equally valid within the United Kingdom. In a lecture to the Conservative party conference entitled "Conservatism in the 1990s", my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, who is perhaps one of the Cabinet's more adventurous thinkers, said:

> "In a more and more complex world, devolving decisions to the lowest level strikes me as a sensible precept. That is the approach that we have been pursuing at home, in health, in education and in housing. It makes good sense for Europe as well."

If it makes good sense in health, education, housing, and Europe, why not also for United Kingdom government?

The dispersal of power has been a central concern of political philosophers since Aristotle. Devolution as a concept is a particular British contribution to politics. It first appeared in a speech in the House in 1774 by Mr. Edmund Burke on the subject of American taxation. Burke is not normally thought of as an extreme, radical

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thinker out of sympathy with Conservatism. He attempted to show that it was possible to reconcile American demands for local autonomy with imperial power centred in Britain. American legislators would have the freedom to decide domestic policies while being subordinate to the imperial Parliament.

When preparing his first home rule Bill, Gladstone—and I am sorry to have to tell this to the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells)—did not resort to the tomes of distinguished Liberal political thinkers but went straight to the speeches of Edmund Burke, studied them closely, and remarked that they were "a mine of gold for the political wisdom with which they are charged."

Gladstone was also influenced by his political mentor, Sir Robert Peel—founder of the modern Conservative party—and his conviction that our institutions could be successfully adapted to the needs of a particular time.

Devolution is not therefore alien to Conservatism but an innate part of it. Gladstone concluded:

"the concession of local self-government is not the way to sap or impair, but the way to strengthen and consolidate unity. Such a policy is eminently a Conservative policy."

That is why I find it so surprising that members of my own Front Bench do not acknowledge that devolution as a concept and policy has distinguished Conservative antecedents, indeed originated with Conservative political thinkers.

If in the view of Ministers the case for constitutional change is unproven, they should explain in detail why they think it is. It is not enough for them to dismiss the question with tabloid slogans or historical quotations, for that will only diminish their reputations. They must heed the mood for change and respond to it. They cannot ignore or dismiss it.

No party which is so lamentably weak as ours is in representation in Scotland and in the Principality and which has gone—I nearly used the word "run", but I respect my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State too much—to England for its last two Secretaries of State can afford to do other than to take the issue seriously and debate it fully.

There must be an end to the current intellectual inertia on this side of the House on the issue of constitutional change. If there is not, I fear for the future of the Conservative party in Wales after the next general election. Our moral authority to govern Wales with a handful of Members of Parliament will be gravely, if not fatally, undermined and we will find ourselves facing a constitutional crisis—a crisis of our own making.

8.3 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Although I recognise that the Welsh environment is improving in many respects, it would be a dereliction of duty not to point to a number of serious problems that have yet to be overcome. I refer first to water quality. Ministers trumpet readily enough that the privatisation of the water industry has resulted in the availability of more investment than the Government themselves were prepared to make. However, throughout the 1980s, the Government gave a low priority to the quality of drinking water and of our waterways, which affected our coastline. Despite the belated efforts to tackle pollution in Wales, serious problems remain.

The Government are also bold to declaim the powers and effectiveness of the National Rivers Authority, yet it is not given the money that it considers necessary to do its job. In the 1980s, for the first time in 50 years, river water quality in Wales deteriorated. Even more worrying is the increase in pollution incidents throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. In 1990, there were 2,707, and that is not good enough.

Worse still, such incidents result in few prosecutions—and when they are successfully brought, only pitiful fines are imposed. In the two years that Welsh Water has been in existence, it has been fined for 17 pollution incidents a sum of only just over £18,000. In the first year of its existence, it made profits of £120 million; and in the first six months of its second year in operation, the company made profits of more than £60 million. The fines imposed on Welsh Water, therefore, represent no kind of penalty. In fact, it is cheaper for a company to pollute the aquatic environment than to meet the cost of 100 per cent. pollution prevention.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: When Labour was last in power, it cut investment in the water industry by 50 per cent. It is hypocritical of the hon. Gentleman to criticise this Government, who established the National Rivers Authority, which has a budget of £431 million for Wales this year. This Government also increased water pollution fines tenfold in the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Welsh Water has already done tremendous work, and the National Rivers Authority is working hard—and this year the quality of water in Welsh rivers actually improved.

Mr. Griffiths: The Minister's panegyrics on the quality of Welsh water and the work of the NRA run counter to certain facts. It is indisputable that Welsh Water was fined only £18,000 for 17 pollution incidents and that the quality of Welsh river water has deteriorated over the past decade. It is also indisputable that NRA funding is less than the minimum that it considers necessary to do its job properly.

Let me remind the Minister that, in October 1991, the Government announced a 12 per cent. cut in funding for the National Rivers Authority; and that, in November, it was announced that, in the 1992-93 financial year, the NRA would receive £15 million less than—in the NRA's view—it needed to do even the minimum to improve water quality.

I emphasise that point because, very often, a single incident of pollution can utterly destroy life in a river. It is important to enter into the minds and the culture of those on Welsh Water, and other companies whose industrial emissions end up in our rivers. In any one year, a single incident of pollution is one too many; and the record of the first two years of the 1990s does not bode well for the rest of the decade.

It is not only the aquatic environment that is threatened. Although considerable improvements were made in the 1960s and 1970s, our air quality is now in danger. The Government are not committed to the European Community standard, which requires the stabilising of carbon dioxide emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000. They appear to be prepared to countenance air pollution simply because other countries are not willing to take action. They have put it on record that they do not intend to meet the stabilisation target unless other countries do the same. If we do not give a lead, however, how can we expect others to commit themselves?

I believe that the quality of the Welsh environment is too important to be left to the decision-making powers of an American President. We need to take a lead for ourselves, and, if necessary, to show the Americans the way. I am sure that, once they had perceived the significant advantages to be gained from commitment to the lowering of pollution levels, they would follow suit.

The sooner such madcap schemes as the burning of orimulsion down in Pembroke are jettisoned, the better. It would be welcome to hear from the Minister that, unless full anti-pollution measures are adopted, that scheme will not get off the ground. Without such measures, I believe that it should be shelved.

8.13 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): A Welsh day debate is a bit of a stock-taking exercise. It is difficult, in the space of 10 minutes, to deliver a full audit on developments in Wales and the effect of Government policies there.

The future is mixed: there is good news and bad news. There have been welcome developments over the past year, and even over the past few months. We should welcome wholeheartedly developments involving factories and other aspects of industry, whose significance far exceeds their scale. The hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) is trying to introduce a measure to allow the Wales tourist board to export work overseas to bring people to Wales. That measure has all-party support, and is long overdue. Last week, the Welsh Development Agency and Welsh local authorities jointly opened an office in Brussels. Many of us have canvassed for such an office for a long time, and it will have an important role to play.

Nevertheless, some aspects of the present position cause considerable worry. An obvious example is unemployment, which has increased by 30 per cent. over the past 12 months. There are unemployment blackspots throughout Wales. Let us take the south Pembrokeshire figures, which should be close to the heart of the Under-Secretary of State. Not only are they high now; they are projected to reach even higher levels—disastrously high, following the closures at Trecwn and Brawdy. In the valleys—in the Cynon valley, for instance—unemployment is unacceptably high, as it is in rural Wales. In south Cardiganshire, in my constituency, and in Holyhead, something needs to be done about the level of unemployment. Indeed, that applies in every part of Wales—north, south, east and west.

The other major problem facing ordinary people in Wales, especially those who cannot get a job, is their inability to obtain housing. Someone who cannot afford to buy will have precious little hope of being able to rent in the present circumstances. Council housing stock has declined; much of it has been sold off. I understand the policy involved, and I understand people's wish to buy their houses, but the stock has not been replaced. There is a waiting list of 60,000 in Wales, and nearly 10,000 people are homeless.

In a civilised society, that is unacceptable. If people cannot obtain jobs or houses, what are we doing to our country? The Government should admit that the problems are serious and must be tackled.

There are also problems in the health sector. I was pleased to hear from the Secretary of State that, during the coming year, the provision of a hospital to serve east Dwyfor and north Meirionnydd will go ahead. I hope that the other community hospitals that are needed in Gwynedd and elsewhere will also receive the resources that they need: without Government money, such projects cannot proceed.

Challenges exist in health care, education, the environment—we heard about that a moment ago—employment and housing. I now wish, however, to address two of the themes that the Secretary of State introduced. It appears that, at long last, a new Welsh language Bill is to be introduced. I accept that the Secretary of State has been in possession of the draft of the Welsh Language Board's most recent version for only a little over 12 months; however, the subject has been under Welsh Office scrutiny for the best part of six years. I remember attending a meeting in October 1986, with Lord Prys-Davies, the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) and Mr. Nicholas Edwards, then Secretary of State. Work has been in progress ever since, and it is time that we saw some action.

The question is: what sort of action will we see? What will the Bill contain? It is not enough to legislate for the sake of legislating; we must get things done. The Welsh language faces challenges that must be dealt with.

In an earlier intervention, I cited the position of a defendant in a court case who wanted to speak Welsh. In years gone by, how many people who were not very good at expressing themselves in English—if, indeed, they could speak it at all—have appeared before the courts, and have not been able to testify in their own language? How many innocent people have gone to prison, or even lost their lives, for that reason? I do not pretend that that happens now, but the fact remains that the defendant in a case is the person on whom the maximum pressure is exerted. If defendants wish their cases to be heard in Welsh, they should be able to do so. It is a question of linguistic rights.

Equally, if a defendant's evidence is to be heard and understood by the jury, it must not be heard in translation. The nuances, the emotion and the uncertainties must be heard and felt first hand.

I understand that, in some parts of Wales, the shortage of Welsh speakers would make random jury selection impossible. In other parts, however, that is patently possible. Cases should be heard in Welsh in areas in which Welsh is spoken. There are centres within travelling distance where that can be done: Cardiff, for example, can serve a catchment area in Glamorgan and Gwent.

Today, 800 people have demonstrated in Swansea because of the inability to provide Welsh language education in that city and the area surrounding it. That should be a basic education right for people who want their children to be educated using the Welsh language. The people of Swansea have lost the opportunity for generations to be educated by means of the Welsh language because provision for it has not been made.

Will the Bill address that question? Will it ensure that equal validity is a meaningful concept? Will it ensure that an individual filling in a form can choose to fill it in either in Welsh or in English? It is official bilingualism that makes equal validity meaningful to the consumer, to whom the Secretary of State referred in his speech.

If people working in Welsh factories who speak Welsh find that somebody tells them that they cannot speak in their own language to their fellow workers on the factory floor, will the Bill stop that discrimination? Will it make that discrimination, which has happened year after year in

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Wales, illegal? When the Government introduce the Bill —if they have the opportunity to do so after the election —that is one of the issues that we shall consider.

I was under the impression that there was to be a debate in the Welsh Grand Committee, sitting in the capital city of Cardiff, on the government of Wales. I understand, though, that there is some doubt about that. It appears that all that the Government have to do is to lay an order. Those who do not want a debate to take place on the important question of the government of Wales should speak up and be identified. I do not know which party is creating difficulties. Certainly it is not my party. If those who do not want self-government for Wales fail to turn up in Cardiff, having been challenged to do so, so be it. Those who are concerned about the future government of Wales should be allowed to put forward their ideas so that they can be thrashed out before the general election. Then there will be an opportunity for a real debate during the election campaign.

Opinion polls published this week show that there is a majority of two to one in favour of an elected, all-Wales body and that that majority increases to 70:30 if a similar proposal for Scotland—some form of Scottish parliament —were put forward. That 70:30 figure shows a majority in favour of the proposition in north, mid and south Wales among the elderly, the middle aged and young people and that majority includes people from every political party, including Conservative voters in Wales. It is time that the message got home if a proper balance is to be secured within the European structure to which the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) referred.

We have to think of Wales, Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom as part of a united Europe, if there is to be a meaningful relationship between Wales and the committee for the regions. The Secretary of State has not said whether there will be Welsh representatives on that committee and how many seats Wales will have. These are important questions. Without an all-Wales level of government, Welsh voices will have no legitimacy in Europe and there will be no democracy in Wales.

The unpalatable truth for the Secretary of State and for the others who sit on the Treasury Bench is that never since 1868 have the Conservatives had a majority of seats in Wales. They do not have a legitimate right to govern Wales. The time has come to allow the people of Wales to have a voice in the government of their own affairs and to decide on the social and economic priorities for Wales. Wales needs a Chamber that can devote all the time that is necessary to the problems that face our country and that can devise policies which meet the aspirations of our people. That is the challenge that faces the Conservative Government and every party in the House. They must come clean and be open about what is being offered to the people of Wales. They must move towards that goal.

8.23 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and many others referred to the clean-up of government in Wales. A corrupt system of quangos now governs Wales. The members of those quangos are mates of the Secretary of State for Wales. He staffs all the quangos of Wales with his mates. The hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) said that he envisaged devolution as single-tier authorities, roughly similar to the present districts. He says that that is the sort of devolution that Wales wants, but he forgets that Wales already has a great deal of devolution. The problem is that it is not democratic devolution. We have devolution by quango, by nomination and by patronage. Such devolution permits the Secretary of State to put Tory rejects—people rejected by the Welsh electorate—or Tory trainees—people who are going to be rejected by the Welsh electorate at the next election—on quangos so that they can develop a little administrative or governmental experience and earn a few bob, moonlighting as it were, by means of this non-democratic form of devolution.

The people of Wales object to that. Why should a Tory Government, who are rejected by the people of Wales, run Wales through nominated bodies that the Secretary of State can use as a form of re-start scheme for semi-employed Tories who have no chance of winning elections in Wales? They obtain power that they cannot win by democratic means—through the ballot box—by means of the Secretary of State's patronage. That is a fundamentally corrupt system. Even as late as last month, with an election in the offing, the Government decided to set up yet more quangos. A higher education funding council for Wales is to be set up. Who do they put upon it? They put on it Sir Idrys Pearce—no doubt a very distinguished figure, but it is not insignificant that he was the Tory candidate for Neath in 1959. I see the Minister of State looking quizzically over his spectacles at me as though I am wrong about the identity of the gentleman concerned. I should like to think that I am wrong, so perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will get up and tell me that I am wrong. That is yet another person on a long list of people who have lost their deposit or who have lost out on being elected in Wales but have been rewarded for their loyalty to the Tory party by being made chairs or vice chairs of various bodies.

There was a day when the big five who were seen as very important to the life of Wales were the Welsh rugby selectors. People went in awe of them. That no longer applies. The big five now are those who are chairs or vice chairs of more than one quango in Wales at the same time. Those five people are John Elfed Jones, the chairman of Welsh Water which was a quango at the time although it has now been transformed into a private company; he is also on the Welsh Language Board; Dr. Gwyn Jones of the Welsh Development Agency and the BBC broadcasting council for Wales; Sir Donald Walters, the vice chair of the Welsh Development Agency and chairman of the council of University college, Cardiff; Geoffrey Inkin, chair of the Land Authority for Wales and of the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation; and Mr. John Allen, chairman of Tai Cymru, or Housing for Wales, and vice chairman, under Geoffrey Inkin, of the Land Authority for Wales. The Tories do not have all that many people to put on those quangos, so they put them on to two quangos at a time. The reason is that the Tories do not trust many people in Wales, because not many people in Wales trust the Tories. Apart from those five people, they cannot find anyone else whom they regard as trustworthy enough and safe enough to serve on quangos.

At a time when the Tory Government are so unpopular, they realise that these chaps go to the same dinner parties and therefore they form part of a little freemasonry which runs Wales, with the Secretary of State's assistance. That arrangement is about as ethical as the day Caligula

appointed his horse a pro-consul in the outer reaches of the Roman empire. At the election, the people of Wales will reject what the Tories have done.

Quangos are devolution without democracy. It is high time that democracy was put into devolution. Under this extremely corrupt system, in which all those people are mates of the Secretary of State, they all throw their weight about to a completely unacceptable extent. Only last week at a meeting of the court of University college, Cardiff, complaints were made that Cardiff Bay Development Corporation was blocking a development in south Cardiff. The college is extremely keen about opening up a third campus. It wants to spend £69 million, which would create hundreds of construction jobs and hundreds of places for students in University college, Cardiff.

Of course, the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation is throwing its weight around saying, "We don't really like this." It does not have to submit that view to any open and democratic test. If it does not feel like it, it blocks it. It means that the ideal financial year has already been lost. The window during the recession would have meant that the land could be bought cheaply, cheap building contracts could be obtained, and the momentum would have got going. That would assist in the creation of those thousands of jobs in Cardiff bay to which the hon. Member for Cardiff, North referred. The reality is that the quangos are blocking those new jobs. It is the opposite of the picture that the hon. Member for Cardiff, North tried to paint.

South Glamorgan health authority is another quango run by a rejected Conservative politician, Mr. Alun Jones. He is close to the Secretary of State and is attempting to hide from the people of Cardiff, West and the rest of south Glamorgan the hidden agenda for closing Rookwood hospital—a rehabilitation hospital—the Prince of Wales Orthopaedic hospital in my constituency, and Cardiff Royal Infirmary in the constituency of the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist).

Mr. Grist: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morgan: I am sorry, but it is impossible under the 10-minutes rule.

Since Mr. Jones is a mate of the Secretary of State, the right hon. Gentleman will not let him down and announce just before the election that those hospitals are to be closed. They are major hospitals and none of them has fewer than 150 beds. We find out about the proposed closure only when a document is leaked to the local press.

The Welsh Development Agency is in an interesting state at the moment. The Public Accounts Committee is investigating how the chairman elect came to have a grant of £17,500. The following year the WDA made it clear that the old corn mill in Porthmadoc, for which the grant was made available under the rural conversion grant scheme, did not qualify. Two and a half years later, the chairman has started to pay back that grant. The money is being paid back only after probing by myself and investigating journalists and with the prospect of an investigation by the Public Accounts Committee. That gap of two and a half years between notification and the money being paid back would not be a privilege applying to any small private business man, but it occurs when one is a mate of the Secretary of State and attends the same dinners. There is the temptation not to obey the same rules as ordinary small business men. That is what is so appallingly corrupt. There will always be the temptation to make up the rules because the Secretary of State will offer protection. I have been told that the shredder at the Welsh Development Agency is likely to need a new motor by the end of this week. I appreciate that that was said in humour, but it is an interesting and worrying comment. I hope that it is not true, as the WDA has to produce a note for the Public Accounts Committee about what happened in the dealings between the chairman and the WDA.

Despite the blithe confidence shown by the Secretary of State in the future of the Welsh economy, a wave of bankruptcies is passing across Wales. The companies involved include Hailey Park Motors, Cladcolor Profiling, Precision Circuits in Cwmbran, Baverstock's Hotel, EC Computers in Cardiff and the Three Salmons Hotel Group. The greatest bankruptcy of all is the bankruptcy of the Government's economic policy.

8.33 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I was tempted not to participate in this debate, because I know that many of my colleagues wish to speak and because most of my day has been spent launching the proposals for the new building in Parliament street. I should like to put on record the fact that, in the Committee dealing with phase 2 of the accommodation, we have total co-operation from Government Members. Unfortunately, I cannot say the same for matters concerning Wales.

When the Secretary of State was a member of the usual channels, I always thought that he had a pleasant disposition and was above all sorts of intrigues. When he was appointed Secretary of State, I congratulated him as I had congratulated his predecessor. I congratulated his predecessor because he represents Worcester, which is where my parents were born.

Many figures for unemployment levels are bandied about. It is worth putting on record the facts since 1979. Part of the area that I represented then is now represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths). The Boundary Commission decided to carve up the constituency in the hope of creating a Tory seat. For the first three or four years, that was successful, but we have changed that now, as on 9 April we intend to change many more Tory seats.

In 1979, my constituency of Ogmore had a working population of 100,000. Without all the distorted record keeping that has been imposed on us by the Tory Government, there was 3·7 per cent. unemployment. A total of 2 per cent. of that 3·7 per cent. were unemployable, as they were ex-miners suffering from silicosis or pneumoconiosis. In 1979, there were seven pits in the Ogmore constituency, employing 7,800 miners. There were many others employed in the industry, in transport and so on and in the many other industries connected with mining.

From 1979 to 1982-83, every pit in that constituency was closed. In addition, the de-manning of the steelworks at Margam, introduced by the Tory Government, led to 12,000 redundant steelworkers, most of whom were constituents of Ogmore. Within three years, 20,000 of my constituents were put out of work. Ministers continue to tell us that unemployment is low in Ogmore. Hon. Members who represent constituencies in Wales and hold surgeries there know the facts. I know that the Secretary of

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State cannot hold any surgeries in Wales in order to know what the people of Wales are thinking, because he does not represent a Welsh constituency.

People do not seem to recognise that Wales is represented by 26 Labour Members, six Conservative Members, three Plaid Cymru Members and three Liberal Democrats. Whenever there are negotiations on any issue, the majority party—the Labour party—should be consulted first. Instead of that, the tail is wagging the dog and occasionally shaking the dog about. The six Tory Members dominate negotiations because we have a Tory Government.

We have had a disaster in Ogmore since 1979. I have given the facts and figures, but on the broader issues we look to the experts to give us the details. The expert on housing is Shelter. No one can suggest that it is dominated solely by the Labour party or trades union movement. I am sure that the Secretary of State has received a copy of Shelter's document. It refers to the housing crisis that now affects all parts of Wales. It

"estimates that 65,000 people will have experienced homelessness in one form or another in Wales in 1991"—

65,000 people homeless in Wales, not in London.

Some of us have worked as volunteers on the soup kitchens, going down to Victoria embankment at midnight to give the homeless cups of soup, chocolate or tea. I wonder whether any Minister is compassionate enough to do that. If he is, perhaps he will think about the 65,000 homeless people in Wales and the thousands of unemployed construction workers who are crying out for a job. They could easily be employed if the Government were to be more compassionate in allocating funds to enable local authorities to build council houses and to house those 65,000 homeless people.

Shelter states:

"almost one hundred thousand homes in Wales were considered unfit or lacking basic facilities in the last government survey of house conditions.

Shelter Cymru's case and enquiry statistics are one of the most complete records of housing problems in Wales. The most recent figures show: increasing young homelessness, increasing mortgage arrears and repossessions, increasing illegal evictions, increasing debt and eviction. The housing crisis can affect anyone at anytime, as just some of the enquiries on a typical day at a Shelter Cymru Housing Rights Centre show."

Mr. Edwards: Those statistics show the housing crisis in Wales. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Secretary of State should show how each district authority in Wales is spending 25 per cent. of its capital receipts on housing? If that is what the Government claim, can they prove it?

Mr. Powell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who covers the point.

In my opening remarks, I referred to the Secretary of State and the compassion that I thought he had when he took office and my reasons for extending him congratulations. I regret that, since taking office, the situation has become drastically worse.

I must refer also to another document—I accept that most of its authors are members of the Labour party or affiliated to it—produced by Wales TUC: "The Training Deficit in Wales and the Wasted Talents". I do not have time to quote from it, because you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are telling me to wind up. I will do so at your request, but I urge the Secretary of State and the few Welsh Conservative Members to look at the document, which shows conclusively how ridiculous training in Wales has become and how badly we have been treated, especially in reduced funding for TECs.

8.44 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) went to the root of what concerns the people of Wales before the next general election. I am a committed devolutionist, but that is not a topic on which people will decide how to vote. I urge hon. Friends who are concerned about devolution and the Welsh language not to mix them up, because if they do the cause of devolution will not be well served. It is important to keep the issues separate.

I want to concentrate on the bread-and-butter issues that concern my constituents. Brymbo steel works made a profit in each of the last 20 years of its existence, yet it was allowed to be closed down by a Conservative Administration who believe more in political dogma than common sense. United Engineering Steels will take two years to clear the site, and then there will be two or three years of opencast mining or redevelopment. It may be up to another two years before any factories appear on the site and jobs are created. That is not good enough. It will be six or seven years before another job appears on the site.

The Secretary of State has to consider that issue, which is essential to people in Brymbo. It is now a dismal place. The ISERBS payments have run out. People do not have money and cannot go out in the evening or be social. The situation will worsen as redundancy payments run out. So far, the Government have not given any hint of anything better to come.

After the general election, my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) will be Secretary of State. I shall look to him to ensure that United Engineering Steels does not take two years to clear off the site. It should take two weeks or perhaps four weeks. We want some action, and I would prefer action by the Conservative Administration in the time that they have left.

There have been developments in the past 13 years of Conservative rule, but they have been rather second-class. The A55 dual carriageway is not finished. It has dangerous junctions where one can turn right against oncoming traffic. People will continue to be killed simply because the Government have not allowed sufficient expenditure to build a proper underpass.

The Wrexham bypass is a dual carriageway. There is an at-grade junction at Croesfoel that the Government are belatedly going to grade separate. How much extra will that cost five years later? Ruabon bypass is dual carriageway. Newbridge bypass is 7 m wide and the Chirk bypass is 10 m wide, all because of public expenditure cuts and dogma. That would not have been allowed to happen on the continent. There would have been a uniform grade for the A483 from its junction with the Chester southerly bypass down to the Coventry bypass.

I asked the Minister of State at Welsh questions on Monday to give a pledge that, if a Conservative Administration are returned to office, InterCity services will continue to run between Euston and Holyhead—a simple, straightforward pledge. I am concerned about InterCity services continuing to run to Holyhead if the Government are returned and they privatise the rail

system. The constituency of the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) will be affected, and his electors want to know where he stands on the issue. Of course it is a political point, but we are in a political Chamber. If he can give a pledge, I will give way.

Sir Wyn Roberts: As I told the hon. Gentleman on Monday, the whole point of privatisation is to improve services and that, of course, applies to InterCity services.

Dr. Marek: It is fine if the right hon. Gentleman is going to improve InterCity services between Euston and Manchester or Euston and Liverpool, but let us be specific. There is a straightforward way of giving a pledge which everyone in north Wales will understand and that is to say, "Yes, we will ensure a continuation of InterCity services to Holyhead." That is the phraseology that reasonable people understand, and I should like to hear it from the Minister.

At the moment, our InterCity service is not complete. We have only two high-speed train sets to Holyhead and we need three. There has again been overcrowding in recent weeks and I look to the Welsh Office to help to get from British Rail a third HST set so that we can have five InterCity trains in each direction each day.

There is a lot of unease in the Wrexham Maelor hospital. The expression of intent that has recently been sent to the Welsh Office refers to contact being made with fund-holding doctors in Chester and the surrounding areas. That upsets my constituents, because it is clear that fund-holding doctors will get priority, and if they happen to be in Chester or elsewhere in England, they will get priority over my constituents in Wrexham. That is not how I envisage that the national health service should work.

I bitterly resent the commercialisation that has been introduced. The expression of intent document also contains phrases about public relations exercises being undertaken to ensure that any opposition is kept to the minimum. That is not what it is about. People are not visibly opposing the Government at the moment, because they know that a general election is coming, but let us be clear that commercialisation will not happen under a Labour Government. It will be swept away.

There has been no new public or council housing in the Wrexham area this year. I have said it before and I say it again—the leader of Wrexham Maelor borough council said that he had £12 million of ready money that he had obtained from the sale of council houses. Houses had been sold, but no new ones were to be built. In fact, I believe that there is more than £12 million, but it cannot be used by the borough council because the Welsh Office has prevented it. However, there are 2,000 or 3,000 people on the waiting list in Wrexham, of whom 1,000 desperately want a home.

That was the very point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore. The money is available, but it is not being used. What nonsense to have such a system. It is a question not of the borough council having to borrow the money and pay interest on it but of its not being allowed to use it.

We have perhaps one more week of business followed by the Budget the following week, and it is likely that the election will then be announced. The Government have run up to the buffers. The opinion polls rightly show that people in Wales desperately want a Labour Administration, not another Conservative Administration. I believe that this time the Government have been caught out in their handling of the economy.

The Secretary of State said that there was a world recession, but he did not say which other country in the European Community is suffering a recession at the moment—Germany, just, and that is because of East Germany. No other country is suffering a recession. Our recession is a home-grown recession. The Government began with a recession in 1979, 1980 and 1981. Inflation went up to 23 per cent. We then had the "loadsamoney" economy, and we now have another recession. The public will not be fooled this time. In three or four weeks' time, I shall see my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside sitting on the Government Front Bench behind the Dispatch Box.

8.54 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I do not intend to criticise the Secretary of State personally, but he has to work within a self-imposed constraint of Thatcherism and now Majorism which means "public bad, private good". There are still examples of that ideological obsession, especially with regard to British Rail with which I shall deal in a moment.

More importantly, the Secretary of State does not represent a Welsh constituency. That has a number of effects, one of which is that he is unaware in his surgery of the problems that I and my colleagues encounter every time that we meet our constituents. Those problems include the slump in housing and difficulties arising from the Government's public expenditure policies. I give the Secretary of State one example.

On Saturday last week, I met an individual who said that he had submitted a detailed application for a discretionary renovation grant in July last year. He is on income support and his wife is registered blind. The ceiling of their home in the St. Thomas area of Swansea has collapsed. He has been told

"that the Council is no longer in a position to approve any discretionary grants for the immediate future"

because of a change in Welsh Office policy. The Secretary of State may pull the levers in Cardiff, but he is unaware of the effects of policies on individuals at the micro level.

The appropriate officer in Swansea city council promises me that he will examine the gentleman's house to see whether

"conditions have deteriorated to the point that a mandatory application can be considered. This is far from satisfactory and only serves as an encouragement to some people to allow their houses to fall into serious disrepair."

What an indictment of a policy designed to treat houses in Wales, which has the greatest proportion of pre-1919 houses of any region. The circumstances which I have described may be an unintended effect of the new priorities within the Welsh Office system, but we are brought face to face with such effects on individuals who live with the ceilings in their houses falling down.

As the Secretary of State does not hold a Welsh seat, he does not experience those effects and therefore remains unaware of the effect of the policies that he puts into operation. That is one reason why the fact that he does not hold a Welsh seat is wrong. It is also wrong because it shows a complete lack of confidence by the Prime Minister and others in the competence of members of the Conservative party who currently hold seats in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Surely the hon. Gentleman is aware that in one year we have spent more on renovation and repair than the previous Labour Government did during their entire period in office.

Mr. Anderson: That remark shows that even those who represent Welsh seats can get just as out of touch. The slump in house building in Wales did not come about by chance, because of some malign fate; it came about because of the reduction in public priorities for council and other forms of building. The fact that more is being spent on renovation is welcome, but I am talking about the effects—possibly unintentional—of policies which have come about because the Secretary of State does not have an intimate connection with the impact of Welsh Office policies on people in his constituency.

The main part of what I wanted to say has already been dealt with by my hon. Friends, who have talked about the effects of Government policies on housing and education, and the way in which the social fabric of Wales has been damaged. That damage has been done by the Government's obsession with private good at all costs, and their failure to see the interdependence of the public and private sectors. If any area in the United Kingdom depends on a positive public expenditure policy, it is Wales. As a result, Wales suffers the most from the Government's obsession to promote the private sector at all costs.

I understand that the Minister of State will reply on transport, so I address my remarks on that subject to him. We in south Wales remember that the M4 was completed by the 1970s. Since that time, transport policy has concentrated on north Wales, to the disadvantage of the south—so much so that, for example, the missing link between Baglan and Lonlas, in my constituency, remains to be completed. Happily, it will be completed soon, as it has had such an adverse effect on our area.

The Severn bridge tolls are increasing, not just because of inflation and other such factors but because of the Government's decision to privatise the new bridge, and that affects tolls on the existing bridge. When business men consider locating in Wales, Severn bridge tolls are bound to be a major disadvantage. Any geographer, or anyone who knows how industrialists take decisions on location, will say that distance remains a key factor. The Severn bridge and its tolls are bound to have a substantial adverse effect.

On the railway, the current high-speed trains represent the technology of the 1960s. They came into service in the early 1970s in south Wales, and since then the quality of rail services has deteriorated. Journey times between London and Swansea are longer, the sleeper service has gone, and services at the beginning and end of the day have been chopped.

I hope that, in the six weeks or so left to the Secretary of State in his present job, he will consider the European dimension, and examine the impact of the channel tunnel on Wales. What effect will the change from Waterloo to Stratford and King's Cross have on the accessibility of the channel tunnel to Welsh travellers? What will be done about the crossover from Paddington to King's Cross?

Because of the Government's parsimony and the harsh conditions that they impose on British Rail with regard to electrification and because by the end of the century, even if we are lucky, only a small proportion of the west line will be electrified, Wales will lose out again, and become a peripheral part of Europe.

I shall finish by talking about the Welsh dimension. The Secretary of State spoke passionately about it, and its impact on Government decisions. An old Baptist minister of mine said that he was advised by a more experienced minister that if one's argument was bad one should raise one's voice. Certainly the Secretary of State—usually so moderate and gentle—suddenly began to raise his voice and flash his eyes when he talked about the Welsh dimension.

Surely the Secretary of State must realise that, at an all-Wales level, there is a great vacuum in the governmental structure. We remember that after the 1979 referendum the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor, Nicholas Edwards—Lord Crickhowell—said that there would be a Welsh forum. However, that idea has been allowed to go to sleep. Much has happened since then.

As for the European dimension, I am delighted that the Secretary of State and his predecessor went to the motor regions of Baden-Württemberg, Catalonia, Lombardy and elsewhere. While in Baden-Württemberg, did he find that the good citizens of that land were concerned about the amount of money that they were spending on their land government? Did he ask them about their system; did he find any great anxiety about the decentralisation of opinion-making in the federal republic structure? I offer the following thought to the Secretary of State: his party, which calls itself a unionist party, may by its intransigence destroy the Union, not only because of the policies of the past decade but because of the Government's failure to acknowledge what is happening. In Scotland, there is a strong view that the Scots want to run their own affairs and enjoy a degree of democratic control over their institutions. To a lesser extent, that applies to Wales too, and that feeling has been strengthened by the developments of the past decade.

The Secretary of State must also recognise that he has caused much offence in Wales by carrying political cronyism to a new art form. He has placemen in a number of quangos, yet while in opposition his party used to criticise precisely that. It is an immense affront to the people of Wales. I do not suggest that these quangos should be wholly or even mainly peopled by those of a radical disposition, but the opinion polls in Wales show that the Conservative party represents but a small fraction of the Welsh people. The right hon. Gentleman has packed the health authorities and all the other quangos with his cronies. He can hardly criticise us if, following a change of Government in six weeks' time, we learn one or two lessons from the rather brutal way in which he has put his cronies into those non-elected bodies.

We heard what the Secretary of State said about his willingness to announce his decisions affecting local government within a reasonable period. He knows that at least two counties have gone well beyond his guidelines on the poll tax. He appeared not to be aware of that—or else he wanted to avoid the issue at this stage. Does he still intend to use the unit set up in the Welsh Office to charge cap authorities which are not profligate but which are forced, just to provide basic services, to go beyond the guidelines that he set?

I think that I have gone over the guidelines that others have set for me in this debate, so I intend to sit down soon.

One thing is sure—the days of the Government and of the Secretary of State are numbered, and there will be a great sigh of relief and much joy in Wales when their time is up.

9.7 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): I am very glad to have the chance to participate in this debate. I should like to discuss my own constituency first and then move on to some larger matters which also impinge on what is happening there.

The Secretary of State for Wales referred to the garden festival which we are to have in Ebbw Vale. I certainly agree that it will be a great event for my constituents and for Wales. In fact, it will be the best of all the garden festivals. I am glad to acknowledge the right hon. Gentleman's part at one critical moment, and at some others, in setting up the festival. At one especially critical moment, he gave us great assistance, and I am happy to acknowledge that.

Having studied the matter—the Secretary of State will understand that I have been closely associated with the festival from the beginning—I know that the bodies chiefly responsible for ensuring that our plan won the competition —it was won against stiff competition, as my hon. Friends from other parts of Wales can testify—were Blaenau Gwent council and Gwent county council. They worked together, and I hope that by doing that they have taught the Secretary of State a few lessons about the virtues of local government. Conservative Governments do not understand local government, but I am sure that the Secretary of State is aware that the proposal could not have been put forward without the local authorities taking a risk and showing imagination and intelligence.

Mr. David Hunt *indicated assent.*

Mr. Foot: I see that the Secretary of State has achnowledged that.

I hope that the Secretary of State will be equally forthright about the question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards), who referred to the opencast mining operation which British Coal would like to operate at Pwll Du. It would be an utter absurdity for our valley if, having seen the possibilities under the garden festival arrangements, British Coal decided to ruin the upper valleys for the next 10 or 12 years through that operation.

The Secretary of State for Wales does not have much time left in office. I have raised the issue of the operation at Pwll Du with him on many occasions. In fact, when he was first appointed as Secretary of State, I wrote to him saying that that was one of the issues with which we would like him to deal. That was quite a long time ago. He could have put the kybosh on it. That would have saved a lot of money, and he can still do it.

When the Secretary of State's predecessor left office, I wrote to him advising him to read the parable of the unjust steward. Not many people understand that parable properly and I recommend it to the present Secretary of State. If the right hon. Gentleman reads it with a proper sense of his own delinquencies—I am sure that he has, although I do not want to mention things like the poll tax —he will understand that, even when an injustice has occurred on the scale for which the right hon. Gentleman and his predecessor are responsible, he can still make atonement at the last moment.

Pwll Du would have figured well in that New Testament parable. I am not so eminent on these matters as some of my colleagues and I do not like to preach sermons other than to Secretaries of State who still need to learn a lot. Even in the short time left to the Secretary of State, when he goes to the office tomorrow perhaps he will read the parable and settle the problem with Pwll Du in the next few days. My hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth will be in this place after the general election to ensure that the problem is solved and he has played a prominent part in putting the case for Pwll Du ever since he was elected. I hope that that will make the Government determined to do something about the matter.

I want now to consider the larger issues. They may not be larger issues than what happens in constituencies because nothing can be larger than what happens there. However, the Secretary of State sometimes refers to the deadly, dangerous or highly objectionable things that are happening in our constituencies which have nothing much to do with real developments. I am afraid that that is a serious misunderstanding of the scale of the problems that we face in this second terrible recession.

All Wales, particularly the valley towns, was hit hard in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983. I remember that devastation. Unemployment rose from 12 per cent. to 24 per cent. in a few years. Not one house was built. Every housing plan was stopped for two or three years, and we still do not have agreement to go ahead in one part. We were devastated.

Of course, there was a huge loss to our economies and to our people when the Government poured down the drain the amount of money that they had to spend to maintain unemployment at 21 to 24 per cent. That is what we had to endure from 1979 until 1983. Of course we did not wish to retain the old industries in the old manner, but we said that such transformations must be done gradually and intelligently. If one hacks away at old industries before one has a proper plan for putting in new ones, one will undermine and destroy our communities and return to the horrors of the 1930s. Wales suffered more from such policies than nearly any other country.

We thought and we learnt from those events. Indeed, from 1945 until the Government came to office at the end of the 1970s, we had the most essential support for our sane regional policy, backed by real finance. Partly, that was done through local authorities and by a Government who understood that that was the way that it should be done. They knew how to spend the money and organise the policy. Partly, it was done by direct regional policies, and we worked them out.

After the crisis of the latter years of the 1970s, we had worked out a more careful, adventurous regional policy than we had ever had before, and we were putting it into operation. In my constituency, we were the first to do that because we had the biggest rundown in the steel industry, but we did it in other parts of Wales, and we were setting the pattern for the rest of the country.

The Secretary of State should not be consulting at this late stage; he should have learnt a long time ago, because we told him time and again at every available opportunity. He and his predecessors came to us and said, "We have a different and better regional policy for you; you do not have to worry." We objected most strongly to the drastic cuts that they made in the regional rate support grant. Every local authority in Wales had to suffer in that respect. We have suffered as much as anybody. On top of that, the

[Mr. Foot]

right hon. Gentleman and his predecessors said, "We have much better ideas for regional policy. We will do away with regional grants and assistance. You don't have to worry much because we'll find something just as good to substitute, and we will do that on a more discriminatory basis," or whatever the words were. Of course, they have wrecked our regional policy and all the advantages that were introduced primarily by the Labour Government. My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), when he was at the Welsh Office, worked out our plans. We had special development area status for places that were hit by 10 to 20 per cent. unemployment. Those plans were in operation for years, but the Conservative Government took them from us.

The Secretary of State's predecessor thought that he knew a bit more about these matters—he was not an old Thatcherite like some of those whom we had to put up with before. He had even heard and thought that Keynesian ideas had some advantages. I refer to the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), and I am sure that he would not disown what I am saying. Even he said, in effect, "I have to agree with the nonsense that they agree in London and carry out the same policies that those half-wits are imposing on England." I was not discussing everything with him in biblical terms, but he was saying, "Look at what they are doing in England," and I was saying, "Do we really have to go through it?" He said, "I'm afraid that those are the policies." We warned the Government time and again. The Secretary of State will confirm that.

Monitoring committees were set up in our time by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), the then Secretary of State. We had special plans whereby local authorities, county councils, the Secretary of State and the Welsh Office could work out a plan for the changeover. We planned to ensure that we did not have huge dents of mass unemployment thrust upon us again. But now we have unemployment again not only in my constituency but in so many others. To have it again after 10 years is a disgrace.

If the Secretary of State wishes to come again to my constituency, I will show him the garden festival, but I will also take him on a tour of my neighbouring town of Tredegar to see what is happening there. I have been the Member of Parliament for that constituency for 32 years and I am ashamed at what is happening. Other towns such as Llanhilleth and Abertillery have similar problems.

In Tredegar we had a problem which was a classic microcosm of the Government's policies coming to fruition. I will tell the House exactly what happened. We had the buses privatised. It was all to be a wonderful plan to make the buses more efficient. Then a few weeks ago the privatised bus company went bankrupt. Of course, that was all part of the plan. But it was also part of the plan that the receivers would refuse to take over the bus station because they might have to apply safety laws and it would be too difficult. So for a whole period the buses of the collapsed company did not know where to go. The whole town of Tredegar was thrown into chaos by what had happened. When we turned to the local authority to rescue the buses from the chaos caused by privatisation and the mad pursuit of ideas by the Welsh Office, it said that it did not have the powers. Local authorities do not have the powers to do everything that they want and, of course, they do not have the money to run the buses properly.

I shall be happy to take the Secretary of State to Tredegar if he is happy to visit it before the election. He will be safer there than in some other places. We will look after him. I will show him the main street of Tredegar. I hope that he will be as ashamed as I am. He will see shop after shop that has been closed by his recession. Shop after shop has been wrecked either by the new rating system or the combination of that with the recession. Time and again we have been hit. It is a shame that it should happen once, but for it to happen twice in 10 years is a scandal of the worst order. I should not be true to the people who sent me here if I did not say these things as strongly as I can. I have sent the Secretary of State messages on the matter, as I have on other issues.

I hope that the next Government who come to power will learn the lessons. I do not believe that it was through ill will on the part of the Secretary of State that he achieved the results that I have described, any more than I thought it of his predecessor. They are the two unjust stewards. It is not a question of ill will. The results that I have described were caused by allegiance to policies which have no relevance to our modern world. Through such policies, the Government turned their back on the real experience of what happens in industrial areas when it is necessary to change from one type of industry to another. We are in favour of doing that when it is necessary. The Secretary of State said earlier that we had delayed the change, but we simply wanted to do it more slowly. It is possible to do it more humanely and to keep communities together. In the end, that is a much less expensive way of bringing about the change than thrusting whole areas into economic ruin and thinking that they can pull themselves out every three or four years.

I thought that the Secretary of State had learnt a lesson, or that some members of the Government had, after one terrible recession, but it has taken two terrible recessions to teach them that lesson. That is two too many. I hope that the new Government will have a proper plan to ensure that never again shall we suffer the afflictions that we have had be bear. Central Government and local government can act together. I believe that the Secretary of State has learnt some lessons about that, but he will have to carry it much further if we are to see for Wales that which it deserves.

9.24 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): It is always a pleasure to hear my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) speak in the House, with his authority and his experience—what a contrast with the beginning of the debate.

When one listened to the Secretary of State for Wales no one would have thought that we have had devastating trade figures today, which demonstrate the depth of the recession and the long-term cost of the Government's failure to act. Exports are down by 7·5 per cent. That is yet another illustration of the Government's failure to manage the economy. Our industrialists in Wales are fighting for their survival and that of their companies against that background. From the Secretary of State's speech one would not have thought that there was a problem. All we heard was a glitzy piece of over-optimistic public relations and a failure to face facts.

For weeks, the St. David's day debate has been hyped-up with the expectation of a statement on the Welsh language from the Secretary of State. In contrast, his announcement was pathetic. The Secretary of State did not make a proper statement. There was not enough substance or detail in his speech for him to answer questions from hon. Members. He showed complacency over education in the Welsh language. He praised the Welsh Language Board and placed it on a statutory basis, but he has not listened to its advice, and has wasted more than a year in failing to build on the consensus which has developed in Wales during the past five years.

Why does the Secretary of State suddenly come to the House with precisely the promise that he was asked to make a year ago? Why has he not put a Welsh language Bill into law in the past year? All he has done is fulfil the prediction that we made in the past year: that he would do nothing until he was brought up short by the threat of an election.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) rightly concentrated on unemployment and homelessness, before turning to the Welsh language Bill. After the election, I look forward to discussing the detailed issues he raised, both in the House and in the Standing Committee which will deal with the Bill that we introduce, keeping the promise that we made more than one year ago.

The Secretary of State has done less today than we asked of him a year ago, and less than we promised to do had the Prime Minister dared to call an election then. If he had been serious, the Bill that he promises today as jam tomorrow would already be on the statute book.

The Secretary of State rejected the idea of an elected assembly, while closing his mind to change. The Exocet from Delyn, his hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan), made a thoughtful speech, which the Secretary of State should read, mark and inwardly digest before he comes back to pontificate—if he retains his role in the shadow Cabinet after the election. The fact is that, with the honourable exceptions of the hon. Members for Delyn and for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer), the Conservative party has run away from the debate.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) suggested that we should debate devolution. That was a little foolish of him when the Secretary of State is under such attack from his own Benches. The Labour party in Wales has had its debate and made proposals, which are public, clear and there for all the Welsh people to see. The hon. Member for Cardiff, North wants a televised debate. He wants the Conservative party to go into that debate with a lack of policy, of principle and of position.

What about a televised debate on the national health service in Wales? That is the sort of debate that my constituents are concerned about, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) said. Important as other issues are, why is the NHS in Wales not an important issue for the Conservative party?

What about a televised debate on unemployment, and the devastation that the Government have created? What about a debate on homelessness, or on the Government's neglect of our schools? The Government will not allow a debate or a vote to those hospitals in local areas that are threatened by opting out or to those who work in the hospitals and care about the national health service. The Government are not interested in debate.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, North was unwise to make a petty party political point on the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill. On a constituency point, I remind the hon. Gentleman that, if he and the Secretary of State had pulled in all the Conservative votes or if the Bill had been a Government one, it would now be law. The hon. Gentleman shoots himself in the foot, as assuredly as he shoots the Secretary of State for Wales in the back.

Even more damaging, the hon. Member for Cardiff, North repeated his usual nonsense in his attack on local government services in Cardiff. With his experience in local government, he should defend local authorities and the electors in his constituency instead of acting as a Back-Bench poodle for successive Secretaries of State. The hon. Gentleman has blamed local authorities time after time when they are struggling to overcome the difficulties that Conservative Governments have placed upon them.

In support of that I shall quote not a politician in local government, but from a neutral statement by the city treasurer in Cardiff:

> "The budget process has been dominated by the threat of charge capping, which has brought a degree of risk and uncertainty that is undesirable in the financial decisions of public authorities."

That is the criticism made by Mr. Peter Brown.

The Government's fixing of the figures for standard spending assessments, with no consideration for need, mean that Cardiff city council has had to cut £1·4 million simply to achieve a standstill budget—last year's budget plus inflation. That is the effect of the Government's decisions.

South Glamorgan county council is in a similar position. To achieve a standstill budget, it has had to make cuts of £4·5 million. That has led to cuts in youth work and adult education. One can respect the decision of local councillors to protect the basic services of the schools, but it is short-sightedness for the Government to force such choices on local authorities which lead to cuts in necessary facilities. For example, the local authority in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) has had to take devastating decisions to close badly needed facilities.

All that has come at a time when the Home Secretary has suddenly discovered that one needs to knit services together and that it is not just policing, but the working together of services and the provision of activities for young people that lead to the reduction of crime. The Home Secretary has had a blinding insight, which he had rejected when we previously put it to him. That has happened just as the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Secretary of State for Wales are devastating the services provided by local authorities.

The Government's expectations for local authorities and their predictions for their finance are unrealistic. What is that all about? It is about the Government's poll tax and the way that it is run. It remains with us. We have heard in the debate about U-turns and people changing their minds, but we have not heard the Secretary of State for Wales and his colleagues apologise for the poll tax.

Let me remind the House of the voting on the poll tax. There were 11 opportunities to vote for the poll tax, which were taken with enthusiasm by the Minister of State—the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts)—and the hon. Members for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist), for Delyn and for Cardiff, North.

Mr. Raffan: It was a mistake.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Member for Delyn has the grace to apologise, and I respect his willingness to do that.

The hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) voted for the poll tax nine times only. Perhaps he was abroad on the other two occasions, because I do not imagine that he lacked enthusiasm for it.

Apart from the change of heart of the hon. Member for Delyn, the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West showed an honourable nil in his voting record. I pay tribute to him for being more far-sighted than his hon. Friends and the Secretary of State for Wales.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, Central gave us some interesting reminiscences in what will be his farewell speech.

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): Valedictory.

Mr. Michael: Yes, my right hon. and learned Friend uses the posh word for farewell.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, Central seemed to blame family breakdown and human misery on everybody except himself and the Conservatives. He fails to appreciate that the realities of social change have been with us for some time and should have been recognised. The Government have failed to act on obvious dangers and are responsible for the misery of homelessness throughout the communities of Wales, much of which could have been avoided had they acted.

Throughout Wales—I saw this in the early 1970s, when I was a councillor—as we built local authority houses and were able to house people, so surgery lists went down. Later, as the Conservatives got to grips with housing in Wales, the surgery queues increased and the misery suffered by the people on those lists became worse. The Conservatives have failed to recognise the reality of what they should have tackled.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, Central talked of hospitals, as though every hospital in Wales was gleaming and sparkling new. In his constituency, the Cardiff royal infirmary is rundown and devastated. Repairs costing £20 million are needed to the University hospital of Wales, and there is planning blight on the health authority and on hospital services throughout south Glamorgan.

Mr. Grist: The major repairs needed to the University hospital of Wales arose in the days of a Labour Government. I recall what happened in 1968 in relation to the concrete that was put in, although I do not think that any blame attaches to the Government of the time. I spoke of the breakdown of family life, the rising divorce rate, the alienation of children from their step-parents leading to the breakdown of families and rows in families leading to homelessness. All the statistics show that the breakdown of personal relationships creates most of the homelessness.

Mr. Michael: I am tempted to say that that is a piece of bloody nonsense—*[Interruption.]*—but I shall restrain myself. Changes have taken place in society, and the Government have failed to recognise them, while other changes, particularly homelessness, have been created by the Conservatives. It is ridiculous for the hon. Gentleman to close his eyes to that fact. He referred to the cash that was needed for the University hospital of Wales. That money must be found, but the Government have given no answers about how it will be found. No doubt they will leave it as part of their legacy to an incoming Labour Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) referred to the scandal of low wages and the Government's deliberate third-world approach to turn Wales into a low-wage economy. It seems that the Conservatives want the people of Wales to be poor. That is why they oppose legislation for a minimum wage. Such a move would hurt the economy, they say. Why can we not learn from other countries—and suffer, for example, the economic difficulties that the Germans have had in the last decade? Why is it impossible for Conservative Members to recognise what has worked in other countries?

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) was right to criticise the decline in rail services and to talk of the cancelled, late and dirty trains and the removal of late London-Cardiff trains. We need trains both ways late at night if the economy of a city and tourism and entertainment are to develop. We need a link to Europe and a strengthening of the Cardiff and valley services. The local authorities have recognised that need and put money into it from South Glamorgan and Mid-Glamorgan, but the Government have repeatedly failed to recognise the need for investment in our rail services.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East referred also to housing and the misery of homelessness in his constituency. The same point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gower who pointed to the horrors that had arisen from Government housing policy in Swansea and surrounding areas. Those policies have undermined family life and damaged often responsible and caring parents and their families. My hon. Friends and I see that all too often as we deal with the problems of our constituents.

The problems of children in Wales, and the United Kingdom generally, were highlighted in a neutral report from National Childrens Homes. The detail of the report revealed the position in Wales for poor families, with poor nutrition, and showed that the effects of eroded child benefit were scandalous in the United Kingdom generally but were worst of all in Wales.

There has been a breakdown of law and order in recent years, and the Government have not accepted sensible suggestions about working together to divert young people from some of the activities in which they have indulged. Indeed, delinquency has almost been encouraged by the Government's disregard of the Sunday trading issue.

It was left to my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) to produce what was in effect a White Paper that the Government should have published, and to present a detailed Bill that the Government ought to have introduced. Instead, the Government avoided debate on that sensible measure and prevented the House from taking a constructive approach—leaving responsible local authorities, such as Cardiff city council, to try to enforce the current law.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) told the House a great deal about the place of the banana in the cuisine of our nation. He was making a serious point about the jobs and future of the port of Barry that I hope will be taken seriously.

There is an international perspective to the problems that confront us. The Secretary of State said that international companies have demonstrated confidence in Wales. They have—in responding to the excellent work of local authorities, the sympathy of trade unions, the Welsh Development Agency—the establishment of which was

opposed by the Conservative party—and the positive experiences of companies that have already come to Wales and know the support they enjoy from the Principality. We need to ensure next that secondary manufacturing is sourced within Wales, and that the WDA's work is devolved to each part of the Principality so that it can approach economic development in partnership with local firms and authorities.

Over the past 10 years, a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends have spoken of the jobs lost in mining and many other industries. I may tell the Minister of State, Welsh Office that, when I recently visited the constituency that he represents, Conwy, I found that Hotpoint, Denis and Ferranti felt that they have been left to suffer the effects of Government policies without Government help. The same point was made at meetings with industrialists in Cardiff. There is general concern about ministerial complacency, with one industrialist telling me only last week, "Ministers don't seem to recognise that this recession is cutting not into the fat but into the muscle and fitness of our industries, which will be desperately needed as they work towards recovery."

After 13 years, we have a right to ask what the Government have done for the people of Wales. Have they helped the old? No, the Government have robbed them of their pensions. Have they helped the young? No, the Government have taken from them opportunities for training and the chance of employment, and have encouraged delinquency. Have they helped the middle-aged? No, they have suffered the mortgage burden that is the result of the Government's economic mismanagement. Have they helped industry and commerce? No, and the voices of people in industry condemn the Government for their failure to help. Have they helped the sick and disabled? No, the Government have attacked and undermined the national health service, introducing care in the community without providing the cash and resources needed to do the job properly.

Have the Government helped anybody? They have helped only those failed Conservative candidates who have been given fat salaries to serve on unaccountable quangos.

This evening, we heard valedictory speeches from two hon. Members who will not be standing at the next general election. We all regard with great affection the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West, and we listened with pleasure to that great parliamentarian, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent. He spoke with authority and eloquence of the devastation and economic damage suffered by our valley communities under this Conservative Government's economic mismanagement.

The hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West gave the Labour party credit for good intentions, but said that the road to hell was paved with good intentions. The road to heaven is not paved with the policies and intentions of the present Government. With the Labour party under the firm leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), we start with good intentions, sound principles and clear plans—and we have a chance of not ending up in the hell of human misery, unemployment, homelessness, and poverty that the Conservative Government have left us as their legacy of 13 wasted years.

Thank goodness there are only a few weeks to go before the people of Wales can celebrate having a Secretary of State elected by Welsh constituents, in a Labour Government led with power and authority by my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn, and with Welsh talent on the Government Benches. That cannot come too soon.

9.44 pm

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir Wyn Roberts): This has been a wide-ranging debate, to say the least. We have been able to take in the Windward islands and the banana trade, owing to the interests of the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith)—including the Geest operation at Barry.

This may well be the last occasion on which I shall address the serried ranks of Opposition Members before the walls of their optimism tumble down at the next general election.

First, let me say a few words about the roads programme, with which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State did not have time to deal in his opening speech. During this financial year, three major schemes will have been completed, including the magnificent Conwy tunnel, opened by Her Majesty the Queen on 25 October. During the same period, a further three contracts have been let. They are the M4/A4042 Brynglas tunnels and Malpas relief road scheme, the A483 Welshpool bypass and the M4 Briton Ferry to Earlswood scheme.

Far from being satisfied with those achievements, the Government remain committed to an extensive road programme. Today, we have published this year's supplement to "Roads in Wales".

A start should be made on a further six schemes during the coming financial year: the A487 Port Dinorwic bypass; the M4 Baglan to Briton Ferry scheme, which I am sure will cause delight to the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) when he can manage it; the A55 Aber improvement; the M4 link to the second Severn crossing; and the A465 Glynneath to Aberdulais improvement.

As hon. Members will know, powers have now been granted to construct the second Severn crossing and the associated road links on both sides of the estuary. Construction of the new bridge is likely to start around the end of April, and the whole scheme will, we hope, be open to traffic by 1995, as my right hon. Friend said. The new bridge—which is to be privately financed and operated—will more than double the road capacity across the Severn estuary. I am sure that all hon. Members will welcome this vital and most important development for south Wales. The new crossing will bring with it the potential for considerable domestic economic benefits.

The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) asked about British Rail. Let me tell him that the best guarantee for the London-Holyhead services is the use that passengers make of them. Ministers do not run British Rail.

We are glad of the general welcome that was given to my right hon. Friend's proposal to introduce a Welsh language Bill. I am pleased to say that the proposal has been welcomed outside the House as well, by the Confederation of British Industry in Wales.

Dr. Marek: Will the Minister give way?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have moved on from the subject raised by the hon. Gentleman. I have little time left.

[Sir Wyn Roberts]

No Government have done more to support and promote the Welsh language than the present Government. We have established Welsh as an integral part of the national curriculum——

Dr. Marek: Will the Minister give way?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have already dealt with the hon. Gentleman's point.

Welsh is being taught in an increasing number of schools in Wales. Since 1979, we have spent some £25 million in support of Welsh language education alone. We have increased direct funding to voluntary organisations promoting the Welsh language from only £350,000 in 1978 to £7·6 million next year.

Dr. Marek: Will the Minister give way?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I know that Opposition Members do not want to hear what I am saying. They are determined to wreck my final speech in this St. David's day debate. The hon. Member for Wrexham is being incited to interrupt by Opposition Front Benchers.

We established the Welsh Language Board in 1988 to advise Ministers on matters relating to the language. They have done valuable work in preparing not only proposals for legislation but guidelines for the public and private sectors. These have been welcomed and acted upon. I have been particularly impressed, for example, by the way in which the Department of Social Security has produced a package of forms and documents in Welsh. My right hon. Friend's announcement today will ensure that that work goes forward.

There is extensive evidence that the Welsh people as a whole wish the language to flourish. Its survival ultimately depends upon the will of those who know it to use it in their daily lives and to pass on their knowledge to their children. No Government can legislate a language into life. They can only provide a favourable framework for its use. We shall continue to do that.

The criticism to which the 1967 Act, passed by the Labour Government of that time, is now subjected shows the importance of taking care over the preparation of legislation. Section 3 of that Act, which relates to the possibility that English can take precedence over Welsh in the case of disputes, was intended to be no more than a means of resolving uncertainties over two versions of the same text. However, that section is seen increasingly as granting a lesser status to the Welsh language more generally. I am pleased that we shall be able to take the opportunity provided by the legislation that we propose to remove the confusion that has been created by the section.

The difficulties that surround the 1967 Act further serve to underline the importance of taking great care over the preparation of legislation. That we shall do. The Welsh language is so important that we must get the legislation right.

Mr. Alex Carlile: A new Welsh language Act would be very welcome, but will there be a right for children to attend a secondary school, if their parents so wish, where the medium of instruction is exclusively Welsh throughout the school?

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. and learned Gentleman knows that his question must be addressed in the context of education legislation as a whole—in the context, too, of the duties of local education authorities and of the reasonableness of the requests made to them. That ethos and ambience have to be taken into account when answering his question. As the hon. and learned Gentleman knows, the number of schools in Wales that do not teach Welsh to some extent is becoming ever smaller.

I must turn to——

Dr. Marek: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have heard nothing out of order.

Dr. Marek: I believe that the Minister has been misleading the House. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not say that.

Dr. Marek: How can it be in order for the Minister to urge people to use the train to Holyhead when he himself uses a——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is attempting to raise a question with the Minister through the guise of a point of order, and that is out of order.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I turn to the speech of the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones). He must hold the record for totally negative speeches. Today he seems to wallow in gloom and doom, rather like a happy hippopotamus. On Monday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales described him as agony aunt, but in my book agony aunts always give positive advice. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside is more like one of those who write to agony aunts. I am beginning to wonder whether he writes to some of his safe socialist friends such as Clare Rayner, who attended the £500 champagne bash at the Berkeley hotel to raise funds for the party. If so, I wonder what he says to her. My mole has been at work.

Mr. Michael *rose——*

Sir Wyn Roberts: I must tell the House of the sort of letter that I think that the hon. Gentleman might write. It would say:

"Dear Auntie Clare,

We've got this awful election coming up and if we win, which I very much doubt, I could become Secretary of State for Wales. I don't really want the beastly job and all the hard work that goes with it, so I am planning to palm off as much as I can to an Assembly in Cardiff so that they can take the blame for anything that goes wrong. What do you think?"

The reply would say:

"Don't worry, it will never happen."

During the debate we have heard remarkably little about Labour party policies, even the finger-in-the-wind policies referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer). We heard nothing of its education policies in our debate in the Welsh Grand Committee. It was left to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I to refer to the policy document. Is the Labour party ashamed of its policies? Other people are ashamed of them, as I mentioned in the Welsh Grand Committee. The two American experts commissioned by *The Sunday Times* to investigate our education system said of the Labour party's policies:

"The Labour Party is a lost cause when it comes to education reform . . . The Labour Party is trapped by its past, a defender of the status quo, and a purveyor of old, hopelessly out-moded ideas."

Of the Labour party's proposal for an educational standards commission the experts said:

"this hardly deserves to be called a reform. It is more of the same from a party that appears incapable, politically and ideologically, of offering anything different."

We have heard nothing of the Labour party's destructive, bureaucratic NHS reforms. It plans to sweep away the NHS trusts and general practitioner fund holders. Is it ashamed of those reforms? Others are, including *The Times*, which wrote:

"The last thing the NHS wants is another upheaval to take it back to the old days."

The news that the Labour party means to abandon the recent reform of the NHS should it ever come to power is immensely depressing. Reform was needed. The Tory reforms are in the right direction and are gaining ever wider acceptance within the NHS.

We have heard nothing of the Labour party's alternative policies for dealing with the recession. Labour has failed miserably to pin the blame for the recession on the Government. The recession is worldwide and everybody knows it. People know that the companies for which they work, such as Hotpoint and Hoover, are facing a lack of customer demand that extends far beyond our shores, to our export markets in Europe and the United States.

Labour has failed to grasp that taking money out of people's pockets through increased taxation and national insurance is a sure-fire way of worsening and prolonging the recession. Every worker in manufacturing industry knows that we need to increase demand for products.

The Labour party has failed to grasp that the key to recovery is competitiveness. Its political somersaults on major issues will go down in history as the biggest volte face of all time. Labour Members will be known as the most desperate political trimmers of this century and the most dangerous since Sweeney Todd. All the chopping and changing of views, policies and principles and all their inconsistency have come about because they have seen their political credo discredited. Socialism has failed worldwide.

Undaunted by that reversal, Labour Members have changed their political colours like the chameleons that they are. They claim to be able to run a capitalist system better than those who believe in it. But even in opposition Labour Members are beginning to find out that their conversion is incomplete. They keep reverting to socialist ideas and their rose is returning to the briar that it was. The suckers of socialism are sprouting everywhere, hence their £37 billion of spending commitments, which make them so antagonistic to the idea of tax cuts to restore consumer demand and lead us out of the recession.

The electorate will not be deceived. They will not be made into socialist suckers. The Labour party will be rejected as having no real remedies to deal with the recession or, indeed, any of our problems.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

PETITION

Mifegyne

10 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): I beg leave to present a petition signed by 324 of my constituents, led by Father Joseph Scally and Dr. Dermot Lynch of St. Theodore's Church, Hampton against the drug mifegyne.

The petition reads:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of the people of the Parliamentary constituency of Twickenham Showeth That we the undersigned wish to note with regret that the Abortion Pill Mifegyne (known as 'RU486') has been granted a product licence.

We believe that drugs and medicines should be used only to save life. We deplore the fact that this drug causes the death of unborn human beings, and we express our grave concern that it will damage women physically and psychologically.

Wherefore, your Petitioners pray that your honourable House, which is committed to upholding respect for human life and protection of the weak and vulnerable, will do everything possible to prevent the distribution and use of mifegyne (known as RU486) and any other drugs which, like it, are produced with the deliberate intention of destroying innocent human life.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Hilda Lewis House

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. David Hunt.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): I welcome the opportunity to raise the matter of Hilda Lewis house, which is on the verge of closure because of a decision taken by the Bethlem and Maudsley hospital special health authority.

Hilda Lewis house provides an intensive short-term in-patient assessment and intervention service for children who have severe learning difficulties and extreme behavioural problems, such as aggression to other people, or who injure themselves so severely that they can cause permanent damage. The aim of the staff at Hilda Lewis house is to help such children to lead as normal a life as possible. I am reliably informed by expert opinion that the treatment of such children needs to be carried out consistently on a 24 hours per day basis, which requires a high staff ratio.

Hilda Lewis house is a highly respected national resource offering residential treatment to children up to the age of 16 who have such severe problems that they cannot be adequately helped in a community setting. For most of those children, Hilda Lewis house is the last hope—the only answer. Without its help, they could end up under sedation in the wards of long-stay hospitals.

The excellent service provided by the staff was recognised by the previous Secretary of State for Health when he wrote to you, Mr. Speaker, in your constituency capacity, on 6 August 1990, stating:

"I am confident that Hilda Lewis House will continue to provide the unique service which it offers. I have no reason to believe that the changes proposed by the Special Health Authority will in any way detract from its international reputation as a centre of excellence for the treatment of all kinds of psychiatric disorders."

In the same letter, he stated:

"There is absolutely no intention to close the unit."

That was on 6 August 1990; yet only 17 months later, on 14 January this year, the special health authority decided to close in-patient services for children at Hilda Lewis house.

I understand that the remaining children at Hilda Lewis house were discharged last Friday without their treatment being completed. I should be grateful if the Minister would tell me exactly what has happened to those children. Are they merely being sent back to their families, or are any steps being taken to continue the treatment that they so evidently need?

Only a quarter of an hour or so ago, I met one of the children—a young lad called Simon, who was discharged last Friday and sent back to his parents. His mother and sisters have to look after him. I dare say that they will do their best, but they face an almost impossible situation without the essential back-up services that Simon had at Hilda Lewis house. It is a disgrace that in this day and age any child or young person such as Simon should be discharged without his therapy being completed. Will the Minister give me a case-by-case answer as to what has happened to all the children who were discharged last week without their treatment being completed?

In his recent letter to you, Mr. Speaker, which was dated 17 February, the Secretary of State, referring to Hilda Lewis house, said:

"The in-patient service is not unique, with similar services in units around the country."

That seems to be a blatant contradiction of the statement made by the previous Secretary of State for Health when he referred to the "unique service" offered by Hilda Lewis house.

Mr. Eric Byers, the chief executive of the special health authority, agreed on the Radio 4 "Today" programme last month that there are no other similar national facilities. If there are similar services in units around the country—that now seems to be the view of the Department of Health—will the Minister name them? Where are those facilities? Is he absolutely confident that they offer the same type and quality of service as Hilda Lewis house? My information is that they do not, and that there is nowhere in the whole of the United Kingdom offering a similar service for such disturbed and deserving children and young people. I am assured that Hilda Lewis house is unique. Children are referred to it from all over Britain and from overseas, which is why it has such an excellent international reputation.

No justification has been given for its closure. In his recent letter to you, Mr. Speaker, the Secretary of State denied that Hilda Lewis house was being closed to provide a magnetic resonance imaging scanner. However, my information is that of the £250,000 that the authority hopes to save annually by the closure of Hilda Lewis house, £50,000 will go towards the purchase of a magnetic resonance imaging scanner although the cost-effectiveness of such a purchase has been questioned by several experts.

It seems that unless the closure decision is reversed, children from all over Britain will lose out. Irene Davis, whose son was receiving treatment at Hilda Lewis house, went so far as to say:

"If the special health authority are saying goodbye to Hilda Lewis house then they are saying goodbye to the rest of my son's life."

In a letter to the hospital, Mrs. Davis wrote:

"My 12-year-old son is autistic, and over the years he has gradually regressed, he has become extremely aggressive to the point of being too dangerous to stay at home, and yet the one thing I want most is for him to be a part of our family, but because of my four and two-year-olds I've had to ask HLH"—

that is, Hilda Lewis house—

"to help, otherwise he would be permanently sent away from home. I don't want that. He is my child, and not an aggressive stranger.

HLH is really making headway with him, and he comes home to the family at weekends, and when they are finished with Paul, Paul will be part of our family with a future. You are taking that away from him, you are responsible for the fact that, due to this action, Paul and many children like him will be separated from their families indefinitely and probably locked away in so-called 'residential homes', which should be called 'institutions'. Well, I hope you can live with yourselves, knowing there are families and children going through incredible pain."

I hope that the Minister will bear those words in mind.

I dare say, Mr. Speaker, that in your time as a Member of Parliament and as Speaker you have often heard accusations, some justified and some perhaps not, of Government commitments having been broken. I have certainly heard many such accusations in my time as a Back Bencher, but I have never before come across a case in which a Minister has clearly broken a written commitment to the Speaker of the House of Commons. What is worse, no justification has been given for breaking

that commitment, and no adequate alternative provision has been made for the children who will suffer the consequences of an inhumane and deplorable decision.

I demand that the Minister intervene now, even at this late stage, and reverse the closure decision, for the sake of people such as Mrs. Davis and her son Paul, the young lad Simon, and all the other children who could benefit from the excellent service provided at Hilda Lewis house.

10.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) is raising this matter for the second time in the House. He tabled a health question for oral answer last week, but it was not reached. I made a brief statement to him about the background to the decision to close Hilda Lewis house. My answer was necessarily brief, as it was an initial answer to what was intended to be an oral question, so I am grateful for the opportunity to explain to the House in more detail the background to that difficult decision.

Hilda Lewis house was created by, and was the responsibility of, the Bethlem and Maudsley special health authority which, as its name implies, plays a special role in the national health service. It has a special responsibility for the care of especially difficult cases involving psychiatric illness.

In London there are a number of such special health authorities within the health service. They have a particular responsibility for providing a research and development capability, postgraduate teaching and training, and a tertiary referral centre for difficult cases. In addition, the special health authority provides a range of local mental illness services. The case that the hon. Gentleman has made for the maintenance of the facility at Hilda Lewis house is based on its role as a tertiary referral centre for particularly difficult cases of young people suffering from a combination of psychiatric disorders and behavioural problems coupled with learning disabilities. That was the specialty for which Hilda Lewis house was designed. The facility provided five in-patient places and 10 day patient places. No one disputes that while it was open it performed valuable work providing care for patients and leading to better understanding within the profession and the health service of the treatment and care of such difficult cases.

Partly as a result of the experience and work at Hilda Lewis house, but more generally as well, thinking in the service about the best way of caring for and treating difficult psychiatric cases of people with learning disabilities has developed during the time when Hilda Lewis house was open. When, in June last year, the health advisory service and the social services inspectorate visited Hilda Lewis house to examine the facility, they said that the SHA should consider the future of the facility to see whether it still represented the best use of available resources. I take particularly seriously the opinion of the health advisory service, which has a monitoring responsibility for mental illness services throughout the NHS.

Those bodies pointed out that the emphasis on in-patient care at Hilda Lewis house was somewhat at variance with developing ideas about the proper way of caring for difficult people—with the stress now placed on providing a wide range of support in the community, where possible, and at the very least—and however difficult the cases involved—on providing care for them as close as possible to the places where they live.

I do not claim—it is not true—that the HAS and the SSI said that there was no place for Hilda Lewis house, but they did say that the future of the facility should be considered. They recommended that the SHA consider whether it still represented as valuable a resource as it undoubtedly did the day it was opened and during the early part of its life.

Mr. Canavan: Saving money.

Mr. Dorrell: I shall come to that. I have looked in some detail into the background of this case, and I am totally confident that saving money does not constitute the background to it.

Following the report from the HAS and the SSI, the director of the facility left in the second half of last year. I am sure that we can all agree that when the specialist body responsible for monitoring mental illness services within the NHS had suggested that a review was necessary, it would have been a dereliction of duty if the SHA had not taken the opportunity provided by the director's leaving to conduct a review, as suggested by the SSI and the HAS, into the efficacy of the services provided at Hilda Lewis house.

When the director left, therefore, the SHA launched a review led not by managers and certainly not by politicians but by a joint committee of the special health authority —representing the centre of excellence for difficult psychiatric cases and the development of the psychiatric discipline in the health service—and the Institute of Psychiatry. The committee was to examine the use of resources at Hilda Lewis house. From a professional and not a managerial standpoint, the committee concluded that the SHA would use the resources better and provide a better quality of care for the people for whom, as the hon. Gentleman was right to stress, the NHS has an important responsibility to care. That committee decided that the resources could be better used.

Against that background, the hon. Gentleman asked me to intervene in the case. If I receive first from the HAS, then from a joint committee comprising the Institute of Psychiatry and the SHA and then ultimately from the SHA board—which is the properly constituted body for managing that centre of excellence within the health service—advice arguing that the resources would be better used on a different model and that the care needs of the client group for which the facility was established would be better met by different means, it would not be my place as a Minister with two years standing in the health service and a background in business—not psychiatry—to intervene and overrule a decision made by bodies with a pedigree in the psychiatric discipline which I cannot hope to match.

However, I can try to answer one or two of the specific points raised by the hon. Gentleman about the last in-patients who were discharged from Hilda Lewis house and some of the points made in the earlier letter from my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he was Secretary of State for Health.

The hon. Gentleman accurately quoted the letter from my right hon. and learned Friend in which he said that there were then no plans to close Hilda Lewis house. That

[Mr. Dorrell]

was perfectly true: there were no such plans. However, I have explained in some detail why the position of the SHA changed during the nine months beginning with the investigation by the HAS and the SSI, the findings of which were published last June. No hon. Member would argue that a commitment, albeit in an august letter from a Secretary of State to you, Mr. Speaker, that there was, as accurately stated then, no intention to close Hilda Lewis house, should bind the managers of the health service for ever, particularly if the managers receive advice from the psychiatrists and specialists in the field with the pedigree that I have described to the House.

Even though the undertaking was made in a letter to you, Mr. Speaker, I feel perfectly comfortable that the advice available—not to the Government, because this is not directly a Government decision—to the special health authority charged with managing that important national resource, and the circumstances have changed sufficiently for a decision to be reached that clearly contradicts the statement made by my right hon. and learned Friend when he was Secretary of State for Health some time ago.

The hon. Gentleman also asked whether we and the SHA recognised that the service provided at Hilda Lewis house was a national service. It is true that the services provided by any SHA are available to the whole NHS. It is part of the purpose of the SHA system that those authorities should develop the delivery of health care and that the results of their experience should be available widely through the health service. To that extent, the service provided at Hilda Lewis house was a national service. However, when we consider the pattern of where the patients came from, it is difficult to argue that Hilda Lewis house was a national service that was used throughout the country.

Between 1985 and 1991, 70 in-patients were cared for at Hilda Lewis house of whom 63 per cent.—very nearly two thirds—came from the South East Thames region in which Hilda Lewis house was located. Of the remainder, 16 per cent. came from South West Thames, which is the next nearest region, and only 21 per cent. of the total—15 cases—came from outside one of the two south Thames regions.

Against that background, I do not think that the case is made that that was a service of extensive value to the Trent region, for example, which covers my constituency, still less to the Scottish Home and Health Department, which covers the hon. Gentleman's constituency. However, that service undoubtedly performed valuable work for the people who went there, and it developed a better understanding of the care of those conditions, but I do not think that it was a resource that met a national need.

Mr. Canavan: The previous Secretary of State described it as a unique service. Is the Minister reneging on that statement? He has only five minutes in which to answer. What provision has been made for the children who were discharged last Friday? If it was a unique service, there is literally nowhere else for those children to go.

Mr. Dorrell: Those were to be my final two points to the hon. Gentleman. One was whether an alternative service of a similar type is available to meet that need elsewhere in the country. I am advised that two institutions offer similar treatment for children who suffer from the combination of acute psychiatric conditions and learning difficulties. They are Harper house, which is in North West Thames region, and the Haven, which is in Paignton, in South Western region. Those facilities offer, I am advised, care that is comparable with that which was previously available at Hilda Lewis house.

I repeat that, bearing in mind the geographical home territory of the people who were treated at Hilda Lewis house, there is simply no support for the assertion that it was a national service. Certainly, there was learning which may be useful on a national scale—I do not dispute that—but I dispute that the service was uniformly available and used through the national health service.

Mr. Canavan: Do any of the places that the Minister has named offer 24-hour treatment combined with the assessment that was given at Hilda Lewis house?

Mr. Dorrell: Again, I am advised that the North West Thames, Northern and South-Western RHAs have a range of services that provide multi-disciplinary in-patient, out-patient community assessment and specialised consultancy for such patients. "In-patient" means residential care for those for whom it is most appropriate. I stress to the hon. Gentleman, as I have stressed to many audiences, both friendly and hostile, the health service's commitment to ensuring that, where possible, all people who suffer from a learning disability, and most particularly young people who suffer from a learning disability, are cared for in a domestic context and, where humanly possible, with their families. That is simply because the overwhelming weight of evidence is that, when that risk is taken and when that attempt is made, the outcome in terms of the lifestyle of the individual is dramatically better than is possible in an in-patient context. There are repeated examples of patients surprising themselves, their families and professional staff by what they are able to do when supported in that context.

I now refer to the hon. Gentleman's question about the three patients who were discharged last Friday. I remind the House that the closure of that facility did not involve a massive dislocation; it involved the relocation of three patients—all of them individuals with the right to expect that we discharge a proper responsibility of care for them. I am advised that two of the existing patients, one from Waltham Forest and one from Worthing, were already in local authority care and have returned to respite care in their home areas. The third has returned to his home in the Oxford area while a suitable placement nearer home is found. The SHA continues, because we are talking about the closure of only a tiny part of its activity. It will use some of the money that is released by the closure of Hilda Lewis house to ensure that there is proper follow-up of not only those three cases but all the cases that stand to benefit from the type of services offered through that important centre of excellence.

The centre of excellence is the SHA. It has a deep and continuing commitment to continue to improve the quality of care available in the health service for this type of patient. It is its professional judgment that such care is best delivered by following the route that it has set out.

Mr. Canavan: Why were the children discharged before the treatment was completed?

Mr. Dorrell: As I have said, the treatment of such conditions by its nature is never completed. We seek to ensure that for all discharged patients there is follow-up and that continuing care which meets their needs is available. That is the commitment which I have given and repeat and which the health authority has given.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 28 February 1992

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Safety at Sea

9.35 am

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I have here a petition I wish to present to the House on behalf of Jennifer Vibert and some 14,000 people. When this petition was presented to me, I was told that each and every signatory had read it carefully. The petition is concerned with the safety of seamen and has come about as a result of the great grief felt by the surviving families of the young crew of the Wilhelmina J, which was sunk almost a year ago. The petition has come about also because those bereaved families feel that the lessons of that tragic accident have to be learnt and they wish their concerns to be brought to the attention of Her Majesty's Government. It is for that reason that I am presenting it here today.

The petition reads:

The Humble Petition of Jennifer Vibert and families of the victims of the—Wilhelmina J", Sheweth that:—(i) unlike the employees of many shore-based companies, merchant seamen and fishermen are not necessarily covered by personal insurance. Yet in an industry with such high risk to its workers, this appears to be a major flaw in the maritime legislation. We therefore propose that Her Majesty's Government introduce legislation which insists that all Shipping Owners are responsible for their employees being covered by adequate insurance in the event of personal injury or death.

(ii) Her Majesty's Coastguard perform an impeccable service by monitoring shipping movements and organising search and rescue operations, within their prescribed areas. However in many cases this area is uncertain. We therefore propose that each Coastguard station is aware of the area of territorial water under its jurisdiction, that an overlap whereby both stations are required to maintain an interest in the movement of a vessel until the receiving station accepts responsibility, as in the case of Aviation Control.

(iii) Having identified an infringement of the Maritime Law, Her Majesty's Coastguards are powerless to take any physical action, unlike their French counterparts. By name and definition the Coastguard are the guardians of our coasts. We therefore propose that Her Majesty's Government supply the Coastguard with the necessary equipment, or access to such, to enforce the powers entrusted to them in protecting all vessels at sea and bring to account those who break these laws.

(iv) The English Channel is said to be the busiest waterway in the world, but without any form of policing to ensure that all laws are adhered to. Because of this many "Masters" comply only when they deem fit to do so, sometimes ramming and sinking smaller vessels, then hiding behind the "International Waters" clauses. We therefore propose that the Merchant Shipping Laws be changed to combine the English Channel shipping lanes with both English and French territorial waters. Thereby placing all traffic under the jurisdiction of the respective coastguard.

This is a detailed petition, arising out of the great concern of the families of the bereaved. The petition ends:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House protect our seamen and fishermen in our coastal waters from unnecessary dangers, and your Petitioners as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.

To lie upon the Table.

Members' Interests

9.39 am

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): I beg to move,

That this House, believing that the concept of natural justice is paramount in trials before courts and all other tribunals, considers that the procedures of the House in relation to the registration of Members' interests, are inadequate; believes that the rules for registration are vague, somewhat confusing and even meaningless both to honourable Members and outside observers; considers that proceedings before the Select Committee on Members' Interests deprive a Member whose conduct is in question of even the most basic human rights to natural justice, to which he or she would be entitled if the matter were being adjudicated in a court of law, including rights of appeal; is dissatisfied with the processes which take place after the Committee has made a Report; is deeply concerned that the House can too easily be confused and be led to a decision based not upon justice but upon party political or personal motives, including the abuse of the party whipping system in what should be a matter for the individual conscience of all Right honourable and honourable Members attending the debate; believes that the case of the honourable Member for Winchester provides a classic illustration of the dangers of abuse inherent in the present procedures, which allowed even outside events to influence judgment; and calls for the appointment of a Select Committee urgently to re-examine all these issues and to make recommendations before similar great and deliberate injustices are done to other Right honourable and honourable Members and to their constituents.

I move today's motion drawing attention to my case in the hope that it will encourage the House to make fundamental changes in its present rules and procedures as they relate to Members' Interests.

On Wednesday 7 March 1990 a very great and quite deliberate injustice took place in this House. It was against me and my constituents. After almost exactly two years to the day, this is my first opportunity to speak in my defence. On that fateful day two years ago, the £480 million Paris scandal was given just 32 minutes of debate in the House but I was subjected to a five-and-a-half-hour internationally televised politcial show trial. At the precise time I was attending the House for the judicial debate, apparently —closely co-ordinated by Conservative central office— moves were being made in my constituency by my constituency chairman, Mrs. Felicity Hindson, to initiate my deselection by means of an ambushed reselection motion which was accepted without my being notified under my constituency rules, namely rule 18(2)(c), and with Mrs. Hindson urging that it would be to my best interests.

On that day I was found guilty of two accidental breaches—SAMA and Chidiac. Those two names are important. I was found guilty of those two accidental breaches—SAMA and Chidiac—of the House rules governing the Register of Members' interests some seven years previously. One of the rules—SAMA—was so vague that I understand that it took the Committee itself many hours to determine the meaning of it. A clarification amendment was then passed by the House immediately after I had been sentenced. I wonder whether that it is natural justice.

My unintentional transgressions resulted in no financial gain to me, had harmed no one, and no Government policy was either changed or even influenced. Despite this, the Select Committee on Members' Interests deemed, on circumstantial evidence, that my errors were serious. However, neither in the Select Committee's report nor in the debate in the House did any member of the Select Committee, or the Leader of the House, attempt either to justify or to explain what was meant by the vital word "serious". In fact, they seemed to lead the House away from any detailed discusion of the report. I shall quote later where these leads happened by referring to *Hansard* of 7 March 1990.

I notice that the Chairman of the Select Committee on Members' Interests is here, and it may be that he will be able to help us later in the debate.

As I shall point out later, I was not allowed to make a speech in the debate which took place on 7 March 1990. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was allowed only to make a statement, which had to be heard in silence, and it had to be totally uncontroversial. Furthermore, I was not allowed to ask any questions or to make any interventions in the debate. I therefore had no chance to raise this issue. In the two years since that trial, this is the first opportunity that I have had to speak on the subject and in my own defence.

Most strangely, the two breaches of the rules—SAMA and Chidiac—concern precisely the same two cases in relation to which I had taken out libel suits against the complainant. Was this merely a very strange coincidenece? The complainant was a personal friend of and had a close working relationship with one of the most active—I may even say aggressive—members of the Select Committee; the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), who never declared this interest either to the Committee or to the House, although he intervened in the debate on 7 March 1990. This is referred to in early-day motions——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. Do I understand that the hon. Member has given notice to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) that he intended to refer to him?

Mr. Browne: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As I have said, this is referred to in early-day motions 1210 of the last Session and 115 of this Session. Since my trial, the Select Committee has investigated allegations against several other Members. Remarkably, all were found to be in error. Indeed, one—a Select Committee member himself—was found to have repeatedly and deliberately disobeyed a specific rule. However, none of those Members' cases was recommended for action by the House. All other pending cases, such as those against other Conservative Members, have been dropped. How was it that of all the similar cases the Select Committee considered that mine alone was serious, just on circumstantial evidence, and given a five-and-a-half-hour debate in the House followed by a draconian sentence? I submit to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the answer was not only injustice but grand and deliberate injustice.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The hon. Gentleman has said that he had informed my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) that he would name him in the debate. I wonder whether he will reaffirm that. Secondly, he has said that other Conservative Members were also up on "charges", which were dropped. I should like to know their names.

Mr. Browne: On the first point, I can reassure the hon. Gentleman. I have written to the hon. Member for Workington. I did so at the beginning of this week.

Secondly, on the subject of the names of Conservative Members, I personally would prefer not to give them. I do not feel bound to give them, but I respect your judgment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and if you feel that I must name them, I must. As I have said, I would rather not.

How was it that of all the similar cases that the Select Committee considered mine alone was "serious", just on circumstantial evidence? I was given a five-and-a-half-hour public debate in the House followed by a draconian sentence. I submit to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the answer was not only injustice but a grand and deliberate injustice.

The precedent set by my case has never been followed. I was selected as a one-off scapegoat. Here I must place on record my sincere feelings. I did not in any way blame or bear any grudge against the vast majority of right hon. and hon. Members who voted in all innocence for my punishment, or who abstained from supporting me. In my view, 99 per cent. of hon. Members were misled—quite deliberately, I believe—and I hope to show the House both how and why that great crime was perpetrated by those in power.

It is vitally important because if that can happen to me, as it did also to the late Lord Boothby before the war, it can happen to any right hon. or hon. Member—or, indeed, to anyone, because ordinary citizens can be called to the Bar of the House. Furthermore, if such a deliberate injustice can happen in the high and sovereign court of Parliament, against which—and contrary to all human rights conventions—there is no appeal, then which citizen of this realm is safe? I believe that the long-term good of the whole is most definitely not best served by the protection of the whole at the expense of the human right to justice of the individual citizen. Surely the long-term good of the whole is best served by the added protection of the rights of the individual to justice. I believe that it is greatly in the interests of the House, of our country and of our civilisation in general that such deliberate political injustice be never allowed to happen again.

I submit that in the present state of affairs no one is safe from an individual purge by Government Ministers for political reasons. Surely such a state of affairs cannot be allowed to remain available as a weapon of government.

I raise this matter in the hope that, despite any official cover-up, the House will look into the issue and so amend its procedures that no similar injustice can happen again to any other hon. Member or to any other citizen who might be called to the Bar of the House.

People will no doubt ask why I have waited some two years until now before raising this matter.

Mr. Skinner: Correct.

Mr. Browne: The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) says "correct", and I hope to answer him. You will know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I tried hard for over a year to bring this matter to the attention of the House. You will know that I first tried to appeal to the Select Committee. After months of delay, the Chairman replied that there was no avenue of appeal. You will know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I have tried to raise this issue in a ten-minute Bill, by means of a private Member's Bill, in a petition under Standing Order No. 132 and in an Adjournment debate. All those avenues, including no fewer than 12 proposed titles for Adjournment debates, were ruled out of order. I was told that my only avenue was to get lucky and win a balloted motion. On 11 February 1992 I received from the Leader of the House a final negative reply to the appeal that I began a year ago. Twenty four hours later I won a Members' ballot for this debate, in the closing moments of this Parliament.

So here we are, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with my first opportunity to speak in my defence. Sadly, this is the story of the deliberate manipulation of justice for party political reasons. It is also the story of a cover-up so powerful that even vast sections of the media appear to have been silenced. Even the boldest men, of great integrity, who have seen and recognised injustice have hesitated. Those whose prime duty it was to speak up have kept their silence.

This is also the story of a long and necessarily complex web of intrigue. It may therefore help the House if I now cite the *Official Report* references that I intend to use in my speech. I shall refer mainly to quotations from the official *Hansard* report of the debate on 7 March 1990, and to the report of the Select Committee on Members' Interests dated 19 February 1990. I shall also refer to early-day motions 1210 and 1211 of the previous Session and to early-day motions 115, 121 and 585 of this Session. Finally, I shall refer to the High Court judgments of Mr. Justice Wood dated 6 February 1986 and 25 November 1986 and to the Court of Appeal judgment dated 23 November 1988.

Two of the most fundamental of human rights are the right to a fair trial and the right of appeal. Those two fundamental rights are enshrined in clauses 1 to 4 and in clause 5 of the 14th article of the United Nations international convention of 1966, to which the British Government are signatories. That convention applies to both civil and political trials.

Political show trials have a classic structure. First, they are preceded by a secret inquisition or inquiry at which the prosecution case is established. The accused is then paraded in front of the public for a sham trial in which he is not permitted any of the normal rights of defence. The prosecution holds sway, as the jury is fixed. It is typical of almost all show trials that there is no mechanism for appeal. That, in itself, is a breach of one of the most fundamental human rights enshrined in clause 5 of article 14 of the convention. We are accustomed to thinking that political show trials happen only in foreign countries, under regimes such as those in Nazi Germany or communist Russia, but even in our own country they happen occasionally. The late Lord Boothby was subjected to such a trial in 1940-41, and one slipped past the nose of this House on 7 March 1990.

It is important that the House, and our country, know something of what happened. My political show trial followed the classic structure that I have described. It was preceded by a secret inquisition or inquiry at which the prosecution case was established. That was carried out by the Select Committee on Members' Interests, which was seen by the media, the public and other hon. Members as being, in effect, the court. The strength with which that was denied in the debate on 7 March 1990, both by the Chairman of the Select Committee and the then leader of the House, shows how true was that widely held concept.

Some 308 Members of the House voted, of whom some 239 voted along the whipped Government line in favour of punishment. However, apart from during the opening and winding-up speeches, not more than 30 Members—10 per cent., at most—attended the debate. As my hon. and

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learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn), a Queen's Counsel and former Solicitor-General for Scotland, said:

"Here we all are. Some members of the jury are out, and some are in. The jury is being asked to say what the sentence should be, but the jury was not even in court. Most of its members who are in court now have not read the report, and do not conceive of the rights or wrongs of what the Committee found . . . this partial jury should not exercise the concept of punishment."—[*Official Report*, 7 March 1990; Vol. 187, c. 957-58.]

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman says that only 30 Members were present to listen to the debate. The truth is, as we all know, that that number is about par for the course. I should like the hon. Gentleman to tell us how many times he has sat in on debates for the Government—before the Government did the dirty on him. He talks about party political reasons, but the reason why he is not a Tory candidate for the next election has nothing to do with anything that the Labour party has done—it is because his own Tory party in Westminster has ditched him.

When the hon. Gentleman was supporting the Tory party, how many times did he vote for a guillotine motion when he did not even know when and how the guillotine was to be imposed? Most guillotines are supported by Conservative Members who do not sit in on the debate, so the hon. Gentleman should not give us any of this claptrap about not many people having listened to the debate. The truth is that he got caught out by the gentleman's club whose members usually sit on the Tory Benches—he got knifed by his own side.

Mr. Browne: I agree with some of what the hon. Member for Bolsover said, but not all of it. It is true that for normal debates in the House there is a pretty good attendance for the opening speeches and the winding-up speeches made by Members on both sides, but a pretty sparse attendance in the middle. That is because right hon. and hon. Members of the House have great pressures on their time. Some 20 Committees sit at the same time as debates are being held on the Floor of the House. However, in a judicial debate—a debate in which the House is sitting as a court, as a jury when people are to vote on whether an hon. Member is guilty, hon. Members should surely at least listen to the case before voting. Thirty Members attending a debate may be par for the course, but the case to which I refer was certainly not par for the course.

In what other court or even tribunal in this land—or in any other country—would a member of a jury be allowed to be absent while a case was being presented, only to return to deliver a guilty verdict and pass a draconian sentence? I submit that the answer is none. Yet that happened here on 7 March 1990. Is that justice, Mr. Speaker?

The sham trial in the House was, as always, made very public, with five-and-a-half hours of prime television, syndicated world wide. The charges against me were made to appear massive, and even combined with innuendo. The apparent unwillingness of the then Leader of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), to reply to a stream of interventions is recorded in column 893 of the *Official Report* of the debate.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman has been speaking for exactly 20 minutes, and it is clear that—apart from a degree of spontaneity introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—the hon. Gentleman has read every word of his speech so far. I have counted six pages, and seeing the notes that he still has, I fear that he intends to read us another 60 pages, which will take up most of the debate, and it will all be written material. Surely it is not within the proper procedures of the House to allow someone to read an entire speech of that length. I understand the difficulties, and that hon. Members may want to use copious quotations and refer in detail to notes—I am not in any way trying to prevent the hon. Gentleman from putting forward a reasonable case—but surely it is outside the accepted procedures of the House to read what appears to be several hours of written material.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All hon. Members are aware of the hallowed phrase that hon. Members are allowed to refer to "copious notes". We have also traditionally taken the view that Members who speak from either Front Bench or an hon. Member who introduces a debate, as the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) is now doing, have a little more discretion than would otherwise be the case. The hon. Member for Winchester will be in order so long as he continues just to refer to copious notes.

Mr. Browne: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will try to look up from my notes to the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser), who is leading for the Opposition. However, I will glance down through my spectacles occasionally at this large volume of notes.

The apparent unwillingness of the then Leader of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East, is shown in *Hansard* at column 893. He was most unwilling to reply to a string of interventions by hon. Members seeking confirmation that I had done nothing illegal. I felt that that was quite disgusting, but classic. Also, in common with all political show trials, the jury decision was—as has already been said this morning—fixed by the ruling party. In this case, the fixing was ensured by the operation of the Whips, both payroll and informal.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but he has now referred to another right hon. Member. If he intends to refer to several right hon. and hon. Members, rather than my interrupting him on every occasion, will he assure me that he has informed those right hon. and hon. Members that he intends to refer to them?

Mr. Browne: The former Chief Whip, the right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton)—yes, I have.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe)?

Mr. Browne: Yes, I have, Sir.

Following the trial, very few people mentioned any of the criticisms of injustice or blatant abuse of human rights. Instead, the public image was created that I had been guilty of a major criminal offence. Indeed, it was interesting to note——

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman is making pretty heavy weather of the fact that he was kicked out of this gentleman's club for 20 days. I call it a gentleman's club,

but it is known as the mother of Parliaments, although only about 42 women are allowed in here. The hon. Gentleman is complaining that he got 20 days. His real problem is the fact that he is not the Tory party candidate at the next election—and that has nothing to do with what happened in this place.

I have been kicked out of this place about seven times, but I did not have any chance to explain. No one said to me, "Dennis, will you explain why you said that the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) was lining his pockets when he picked up that non-executive directorship of British Telecom?" I would have loved to tell everyone all about that, but Mr. Speaker said, "On your bike—early bath," and off I had to go.

When I called the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) a pompous sod, Mr. Speaker said to me, "You had better withdraw that". I said I would withdraw "pompous", but said, Mr. Speaker "That's not the word I'm looking for." There was laughter in the House and everyone thought that I had hit the nail on the head. I thought that that was a real parliamentary triumph, but Mr. Speaker thought differently. He said, "Off you go," and I did not get a chance to reply.

I accused the noble Lord, Lord Pym, when he was a Member of this House, of being the Minister for unemployment because there were nearly 2 million people on the scrap heap—that pile of human misery known as the dole queue. Again, I was not able to make a speech before Mr. Speaker sent me out.

Those were all genuine statements that I had to make. The hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) was kicked out for 20 days because he lined his pockets with about £50,000 and did not put it in the register as he is supposed to do, and now he is whingeing but I reckon he got away with blue murder.

Mr. Browne: I have noted what the hon. Gentleman said. I actually have not mentioned 20 days yet, and I totally refute the claim that I lined my pockets with £50,000 and did not report it. That was not true, and it is part of what this whole debate is about.

It was interesting to note that although the Select Committee felt my errors to have been serious, not one member of that Committee, nor the Leader of the House, ever attempted to explain how or why those accidental errors were considered serious. Before I describe the details of what happened in my case, I wish to point to some general points on the subject of the Register of Members' Interests which I hope will be of interest and help to the House.

The Members' interest registry was initiated for very understandable and good reasons, to show Members' interests to the public and to the House. It is a laudable aim, but there are serious problems and anomalies. First, our Parliament consists of two Houses—a Commons House and a House of peers. This is an important but much overlooked point which I will return to later in my speech. The declaration of financial interests applies only to the Commons House and yet the House of peers execute legislation and have great influence over the Government. Why is there no declaration for all of Parliament?

Secondly, the register is of financial interests and yet monetary amounts are not required to be registered. Is that not only farcical, but downright misleading? How does it truly inform either the public or the House?

Thirdly, in the early 1980s the register was treated in a very casual manner indeed. When my case came to this House in 1989 about events in 1982, some of my hon. Friends and hon. Members opposite admitted to me that they had not even heard of the register—hence, I imagine, the greatly increased size of the registry since I was arraigned.

Fourthly, as it is not a legal requirement, the registry is, as Mr. Enoch Powell maintained, unconstitutional. Worse still, because it is not a legal requirement, anyone brought to account under it is given none of the legal protection normally afforded to anyone standing accused of a crime in law.

Fifthly, the rules of registration are vague—for example, the rules about declaration of foreign earnings. When I went to the registrar in 1982, I was told that the foreign earning of my company, if my company was declared, need not be declared as a client unless it was specifically related to the House. I was accused of not reporting it as an earning to me. Interestingly enough, it took the Committee hours to decide what that rule meant, and it was changed after my sentence: 10 minutes after my sentence, the rule was changed to say that if one owned a certain percentage of one's company, then one had to declare it.

I also looked at the register of interests and the sort of groups of people who were declaring overseas payments, and found virtually none: no farmers, no scriptwriters, no broadcasters, journalists, lawyers or barristers—none of those people. Yet surely one, at least, of all the hundreds in the book must surely have had some foreign-derived earnings.

Mr. Skinner: How does the hon. Gentleman know that?

Mr. Browne: I did not say that I knew, but looking at the registry in 1982, 1983 and even in 1989, the guideline seems to be that if earnings go to a company, the earnings are not declared as foreign payments, and that they should only have been declared as foreign payments if they actually went to the Member concerned. That is only a guideline, but it is something that I went by in those early days, plus consulting the Registrar himself—who, incidentally, was not called to give evidence by the Select Committee and I was not allowed to call him myself.

Also, there are no strict definitions of sibling relationships such as there are in relation to the law on insider trading and securities. In the registry, this is still an area of very considerable doubt and therefore of danger to right hon. and hon. Members.

The rules are somewhat vague and, as I have said, they are therefore dangerous because they can be bent by those in authority to snare almost any hon. Member who has outside interests. This is a danger hanging over many Members, particularly now that this subject is taken far more seriously and, I believe, correctly.

Sadly, there is precedent for abuse of this danger hanging over hon. Members. In the two cases that I shall mention, the abuse was carried out by Government Whips who, although they strenuously deny it, have control at least over the profile of the majority of Select Committee members and can very strongly influence their voting.

The case of the late Lord Boothby was described superbly in the recent excellent book by my hon. Friend

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the Member for Cambridge (Sir R. Rhodes James) entitled "Bob Boothby". I quote briefly from that book, from chapter 11, "A Terrible Injustice", on pages 270 to 298:

"A Select Committee is not a court of law and one of its fundamental problems is examining matters of this kind is that it is composed of Back-Bench MPs who are in fact judge and jury. The conclusions of the Committee were heavily and unfairly loaded against Boothby. There was no evidence that Boothby had any expectation of payment. Boothby was allowed to defend himself in his speech in Parliament. His speech influenced the opinion of Parliament"

—I will bring out later the fact that I was not allowed to make such a speech but merely a statement—

"Churchill then intervened and recommended that the House not proceed any further in the matter. The Government gave a clear message to the press that they would oppose any motion to condemn him."

The vague rules on Members' interests are potentially very dangerous for many hon. Members, particularly when we see the precedent for the abuse of power to distort justice.

Briefly, the background to the Select Committee inquiry was this. In the general election campaign of 1987, Mr. David Leigh, a journalist from *The Observer*, made several serious allegations that I had incorrectly registered my Member's interests some years before. This was seized upon, understandably, by my local media and had a major impact on my support. My share of the vote was seriously eroded and there was a cut in my majority of approximately a half. It provided grounds for subsequent moves against me in my constituency. Suits for libel were issued against Mr. David Leigh and I had every hope of a major settlement. The suits for libel were issued against Mr. Leigh on the subjects of SAMA and Chidiac, in which I and my lawyer thought Mr. Leigh was particularly vulnerable, and so obviously that a court of law might be prepared to rule favourably upon them even though they were to do with the rules of this sovereign House. As I said, I had every hope of a major settlement.

Subsequently, Mr. Leigh made a complaint against me to the Registrar of Members' Interests on those two issues and a number of surrounding issues. I was very confident of my innocence, and even welcomed the hearing before the Select Committee publicly so as to put an end to the sniping articles on the subject in some sections of the press. What I did not know was that Mr. David Leigh was a close friend of and had a close working relationship with a leading member of that Select Committee—the hon. Member for Workington. I was asked to make written submissions to the Select Committee in response to Mr. Leigh's complaints in the spring of 1989.

After some delays, I was finally summoned before the Select Committee in the early summer of 1989. I sat before some 10 or 11 Members over some three sessions to answer just under 1,000 rapid-fire questions concerning some 20 companies over a time span of some 12 years. It was a mind-boggling exercise in research and in memory. I understand that the Committee and, indeed, the Conservative Whips experienced great difficulty in obtaining agreement to the report from the hon. Member for Streatham (Sir W. Shelton). However, after some seven further months of so-called deliberation during which there was a constant flow of leaks to my local press, the Committee issued its report on 19 February 1990.

The Select Committee was widely seen as a court and its report was greeted with headlines normally reserved only for mass murderers and rapists. However, the court or Select Committee proceedings were criticised repeatedly in the debate by right hon. and hon. and learned Members with considerable legal experience for not having adopted procedures of natural justice towards me as the accused. Particularly noteworthy are the criticisms levelled by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence), an experienced barrister and junior judge. He criticised the Select Committee as

"Whether intentionally or not, it was the worst type of kangaroo court but the press have been noticeably silent about that."

He also pointed, in *Hansard* column 933, to what he termed "the smell of scapegoat". He also remarked on the smell of witch-hunt and the hypocrisy of the House. Most interestingly, he pointed to a catalogue of manifest injustices perpetrated against me. He said that

"it would be a great injustice for us to use"—

"me" in brackets—

"as a scapegoat to exorcise . . . embarrassment about . . . the criticism that our rules on Members' interests are inadequate."

What my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton was referring to was the following catalogue of injustice. The Select Committee hearings, first of all, were all held in secret. None of the evidence was taken on oath. Secondly, contrary to Standing Orders of the House, I was not allowed to hear and thereby challenge directly in cross-examination the evidence of any witness whatsoever. Only rough typescript proofs were provided retrospectively. They were difficult to read and very difficult to handle because of their bulk and the bad copying. This was to the distinct disadvantage of me as the accused operating alone, unlike the Committee with its vast secretariat. From his similar experience, the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) said in the debate:

"Everything that the hon. and learned Member for Burton has just said about taking evidence was absolutely true. One writes to the Committee, its members write back, and there is no cross-examination or proper *Hansard*. At the end, the Committee makes a pronouncement and the word goes out to grovel.

If hon. Members grovel and apologise, they will be let off with a caution and it will all be over in two or three weeks."

—[*Official Report*, 7 March 1990; Vol. 168, c. 935-41.]

In addition to this, I, unlike certain members of the press, was not informed when the Committee called witnesses until some weeks later—after the fact. Is that justice, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Thirdly, I was specifically denied the right to call any witness in person for cross-examination. Here the assertion to the contrary by the Chairman of the Committee, the hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith), in *Hansard* columns 906 and 907, seems to me to be quite extraordinary and was in direct conflict with the statement of his Select Committee colleague, the hon. Member for Streatham, who in column 918 clearly stated to the House that there was no verbal cross-examination except by the Committee. In the fact, I was specifically forewarned by the Registrar that only the Committee was empowered to call witnesses and that I would have to be content with asking for written statements.

The lack of equality in the calling of witnesses was crucial. The Select Committee was able to recommend that the written evidence of vital defence witnesses such as that of Mr. Chattington in the report, page 28, paragraph 54, and of Mr. Denton-Thompson, page 147, be ignored by the House. Neither defence witness was called by the

Committee to explain or to support their written statements which the Committee criticised or ignored out of hand. Is that justice, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Fourthly, there was no representation. This case was vastly complex. I was arraigned not to explain or to testify about some political issue but was on trial for my political and personal life. Despite that, I was denied the effective counsel or assistance of a lawyer, except over the physical handling of the vast documentation. Indeed, the hon. Member for Workington even protested in question 282 when I referred to my solicitor to gain a more informed answer as to a legal question.

Why was it that in 1940 I understand the late Lord Boothby was allowed to have his legal representation? Why was it that after my case, on 13 January this year even the Maxwell brothers were allowed legal representation before a Select Committee and addressed the Select Committee through them? Why was I, uniquely as an accused, denied that important protection and most important assistance? Is that justice, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Fifthly, no right of discovery. The documentation produced by the complainant, Mr. Leigh, was vast, comprising some 100 documents, some over 30 pages long. To my knowledge there were no originals. The copies were very poor and badly collated. The documents were largely stolen from my personal and company files. They were produced very selectively and out of context. This was greatly to the disadvantage of the accused, as there was no means by which I could put crucial documents into context, particularly in the relationship between me and each of the Chidiac brothers and with regard to the missing SAMA report and its relationship to the supplementary Prime Minister's question that I asked.

Even the Committee found it difficult to obtain certain documents, but, remarkably, paragraph 60 of the report then criticised me who, acting without the Committee's powers of discovery, was unable to trace or recover certain stolen documents such as the SAMA report.

The point about the SAMA report is most interesting. First, I wonder how Mr. Leigh could have written his detailed articles on SAMA in 1987 without referring to it. I believe it was stolen from my company's files along with other evidence produced by Mr. Leigh, which was widely acknowledged as stolen property, most probably by my ex-wife. If the SAMA report was stolen, how could I produce it? Even more interestingly, in the report questions 310 to 317, it is clear how heavily the hon. Member for Workington, a close friend of Mr. Leigh and working with him on this project, criticised me for not finding the SAMA report. But why did Mr. Leigh not produce it? I ask, could it have been that it would have proved conclusively that it had no relationship with the supplementary question that I put to the Prime Minister? Is that justice, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

No. 6—no statute of limitations. The Committee accepted to investigate all the charges made against me, even the most trivial, including minor errors that I had already admitted. This made the case vastly more complex in its ramifications. The case, as I said, covered some 20 companies over a span of some 12 years. *[Interruption.]* I wonder what the Leader of the House was looking at. The questioning of one man alone by 11 prosecutors putting rapid-fire questions at random is awesome. Given the complexity and in the circumstances of this case, it was a grave injustice.

Great sympathy was shown by the hon. Member for Workington over this issue to one of his prosecution witnesses, Mr. Brian Deutsch, whose memory was very hazy about only one company in which he had worked almost full time. On the contrary, I was criticised severely in the report for not remembering precise details of events that had taken place many years before regarding companies in which I had been involved on a very part-time basis, such as in the report, paragraph 59. The hon. Member for Streatham, a member of the Committee, made a special point of this when he said:

"To have something dredged up after eight years is absurd."

No. 7—time pressures. Time pressures were exerted upon me as the accused. Despite the fact that the Committee took some nine months in its deliberations, decisions at which I was permitted to be present, which were merely three when I was being examined, were all pressured for time. Examples of this exercise of time pressure against the accused are in the report at question 523—I am sorry I must return to that. These were not time pressures exercised against the accused, but time pressures that resulted in pressure against the accused. I do not accuse my right hon. Friend of deliberately doing this at all, it is just that the time pressure did act against the accused.

Examples are the time pressure in questions 523, 593, and 763, and also, contrary to normal Select Committee procedure, I as the accused was not given the time to complete an opening statement, and this was referred to in the report, questions 269 to 296. I must emphasise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this was my only chance in that whole proceeding of nine—almost 11—months, to speak in my own defence. Was that justice, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

The eighth point is that there was no prosecution case. Mr. Leigh presented allegations. He did this outside my presence and I was unable to challenge or cross-examine him verbally on a contemporary basis. There was no single line of argument that could be followed from one prosecutor, as there is in a case in a normal court. I was therefore given no structure and no knowledge as to what points the Select Committee considered important among a vast array of often unsupported allegations and so-called but unsworn evidence. This, combined with the time pressures, I submit, acted seriously against me as the accused. There was also no defence. While I was allowed to make written submissions, they in no way equated to the contemporary challenges of verbal evidence that take place in a normal court. Furthermore, as there was no prosecution case I as the accused had no knowledge of which of the myriad subjects the Committee would consider important.

Nine—the onus of proof. A reading of the report will show clearly that the onus of the proof was placed, contrary to basic tenets of English law, squarely upon the accused. This was clearly pointed out by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton, and examples include SAMA and Chidiac.

Tenth, no motive was either alleged or established. Indeed, the complainant made note of the fact that he felt that my alleged breaches were not necessarily intentional. Any transgressions were accidental. Yet the Select Committee deemed these technical errors to be serious although, as I have said before, none of the members of the Select Committee when speaking in the debate sought to

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describe to the House what they meant by serious. Indeed, the hon. Member for Wealden, the Chairman of the Committee, said:

"I do not wish to go into the reasons why we came to our conclusions and what we did."

Is that justice, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

The eleventh point is that questions of publicity ranged far outside the scope of the Register of Members' Interests. The hon. Member for Workington was allowed by the Chairman, the hon. Member for Wealden, to introduce sub-judice law suits and have monetary amounts disclosed to the public—all contrary to the declaration of rules which specifically exclude monetary amounts. The latter point was used in the SAMA case greatly to my disadvantage as the accused by encouraging jealousy, and thus expressed outrage both in the media and by fellow Members who were later to sit in judgment.

The twelfth point was the charade of unamimity. While the Select Committee report was approved unanimously by its members, only one of them, the Chairman, the hon. Member for Wealden, attended more than 84 per cent. of the sessions. Unlike the King's Cross Bill, of which I have an example here which I quote from and which every Member of this Committee was asked to sign—I was one of those Members—which states:

"I the undersigned, having been selected by the Committee of Selection to serve as a Member of the Committee on the King's Cross Bill, hereby declare that my constituents have no local interest and that I have no personal interest in the said Bill, and that I will never vote on any question which may arise without having duly heard and attended to the evidence relating thereto."

I think that that is very correct, but no such demand was made on members of the Select Committee on Members' Interests, who were voting on a vitally important judical matter affecting the whole future life of one of their colleagues, although they had not even been present for the evidence. Again, in a matter of this importance the mere assumption that Members had read the vast and unclear transcripts surely was not good enough. Is that justice, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Finally, there was no right of appeal. The most obvious denial of basic human rights to natural justice was the complete absence of appeal, and this was in direct violation of clause 5 of article 14 of the United Nations international convention on civil and political rights. Again, I ask, is that human rights to basic justice, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

I would now like to turn to the question of political bias on a Committee. It is obvious to anyone studying the reports of Select Committees that strong political bias normally exists. I submit that the Select Committee on Members' Interests was no exception. Again, the repeated protests in the debate of 7 March 1990 by the Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Wealden, show how conscious the Committee must have been about this matter. In the debate the hon. Member for Wealden said, referring to the hon. Member for Workington:

"I can speak with my hand on my heart when I say that the hon. Members for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), . . . were hon. members of that Committee, were totally bi-partisan. No sign of political passion crept into the Committee to prejudice the case against my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Winchester."—[*Official Report*, 7 March 1990; Vol. 168, c. 900-37.]

These statements were particularly interesting in the light of the vote of the House on 7 March 1990, which was very strictly along party lines. It was also most interesting with regard to the crucial defence evidence in this respect of Mr. Merrick Denton-Thompson, which was written on page 147 of the report. I quote from the letter written to me by Mr. Denton-Thompson on 8 June 1989, submitted in evidence to the Select Committee and in the report, page 147, but discarded by the Committee out of hand. The last paragraph states:

"I am, however, extremely concerned that two Labour Members of the Committee made it quite clear to Mr. Valters that they believed that you would be found in breach of the code of practice and they were both actively seeking evidence against you in a way that could not be described as impartial, indeed they were said to be 'after your blood', 'We will do him'. I have been uncertain as to whether I should alert you to their biased and partial activities, because clearly you are in a very invidious position. Under normal circumstances I would take little notice of statements from the press. However I know this reporter well and indeed he is both totally trustworthy and reliable. As I have no involvement with politics he would have gained nothing by making his comments to me. Please do not hesitate to use this letter at your discretion."

I submitted the letter to the Select Committee. This crucial evidence of alleged political bias was discarded out of hand by the Select Committee, who made no attempt to call Mr. Denton-Thompson to the Committee to be cross-examined. I was not allowed to call him to give evidence verbally to the Committee. Was that denial of the basic right to call a witness justice? The political motivation risked being bust wide open and the evidence was disregarded out of hand.

Secondly, I should like to refer to the bias of friendship. Unlike any court, quasi-court, tribunal or even judical Select Committee, such as sat on the King's Cross Bill, the members of the Select Committee on Members' Interests who were effectively trying a colleague for his political and family life were not asked to make any declaration whatever on whether they had any personal friendship or business relationship with any of the witnesses appearing before them. Such a crucial relationship existed with perhaps the key member of the Select Committee, who intervened repeatedly in the House debate—the hon. Member for Workington. Early-day motion 1210 refers to that.

The findings of the Select Committee are contained in its report to the House of 19 February 1990. It is a vast document and was obviously read by very few hon. Members. However, the Chairman, the hon. Member for Wealden, tried to persuade the House otherwise. He said:

"Many hon. Members have studied the matter closely and read the report, and it is they who will pronounce at the end of the day."—[*Official Report*, 7 March 1990; Vol. 168, c. 900.]

There was no mention of the party Whips in that. The statement was followed by the submission of a socialist, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). I have not warned him about this, but I will merely quote from what he said in *Hansard*. Is that in order, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should give notice to an hon. Member if he wishes to refer to him or, indeed, quote him. The hon. Gentleman would be wise to leave that out.

Mr. Browne: I will leave this out on your recommendation, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I was found guilty of the accidental, technical breach of two rules: one so vague that it had to be corrected 10 minutes after I was sentenced. In the SAMA case—

Mr. Fraser: The hon. Gentleman has dealt with some of the technicalities in his long speech. As I understand it from reading the report, the issue on SAMA is relatively simple. The hon. Gentleman's company, Falcon, received $88,000 from the Saudi Arabian Government. I will concede to the hon. Gentleman that the wording of the lists of interests is vague in some respects, but once it was drawn to his attention that there was some concern about the $88,000 that he received through his company from the Saudi Arabian Government, why did he not then declare it?

Mr. Browne: When the hon. Gentleman says "attention", does he mean by the Select Committee or in newspaper articles?

Mr. Fraser: By Mr. Leigh.

Mr. Browne: As I said to the Select Committee, the reason was because I thought that I was right. I had asked the then Registrar on this particular issue whether I had to declare the payment and his answer had been that if the payment was made to my company which was declared in the normal course of business, it was not a payment to me and need not be declared. He even cited the hypothetical case that if an hon. Member were a director of ICI and all the foreign payments to ICI were printed in the Register of Members' Interests, the computer book would be hugely thick every day just on payments to ICI. That was the justification. Yet, when the Select Committee looked at the matter some eight or nine years later, it read through that and said, "Ah, the hon. Gentleman should have declared that because he owned 50 per cent. of the stock of the company". As I understand it, and the Member for Wealden will verify this, the Committee took several hours to discuss what the foreign payments rule meant. Then, 10 minutes after I had been sentenced by the House, the rule was changed to say clearly that if a Member owns more than 33 per cent. of his company—the Chairman will correct me if I am wrong—he must declare all foreign payments to it, although it itself is declared. That was not part of the rule in 1982 or before 7 March 1990.

In the SAMA case, I had asked the Registrar whether a foreign payment to my company should be declared. In 1983 he told me, as he told other hon. Members, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), that if the company to which the payment was made was itself declared, as mine was, there was no need to declare the payment if it was made in the course of business. Despite that, the Select Committee apparently made no attempt to call the registrar to give oral evidence. Nor did it call any of the other hon. Members, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton, to whom the same advice had been given. I was specifically prevented from calling the registrar or any of the hon. Members to give verbal evidence. Is that justice, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

The Committee said that the payment should have been declared because I owned 50 per cent. of the common stock of the company. That ownership rule was not part of the Members' interests rule and was added retrospectively by the House immediately after my sentence on 7 March 1990. It appears that the Select Committee was somewhat desperate to obtain a conviction on this issue. What is strange is that nothing has been done with regard to the other Conservative Members who were vulnerable on precisely the same point. Stranger still is that all similar potential cases have been dropped.

Mr. Skinner: Name them.

Mr. Browne: It is worth noting that the SAMA case was the subject of one of the two potentially massive libel suits that I had out against Mr. David Leigh, the chief complainant.

In the Chidiac case the sibling relationship between the two Chidiac brothers appears to have been crucial. Although Arab people are not always strict about such matters as the use of writing paper, the Committee made much of the fact that Mr. Charles Chidiac had used the stationery of the London office of his brother's company. That, combined with the sibling relationship, led the Committee to say that I should have been aware that that relationship made my relationship with each of them declarable. The rules made no mention of sibling relationships. Again, there appears to have been considerable bending of the letter of the rules to obtain a prosecution.

Furthermore, although the Select Committee admitted on page 32, paragraph 99 that they

"have not been able entirely to get to the bottom of this matter"

and that "the information we have"—most of it stolen —"is incomplete", it discarded out of hand evidence from me and Mr. Chidiac without calling any of the other parties concerned to give evidence. It appears that, despite the onus of proof that was placed clearly on me as the accused, the Select Committee was thirsty for a conviction on this issue.

The big and burning question remains: why those two particular issues? In neither case had any person been harmed. There was no financial gain to me and no Government policy was either changed or influenced as a result of the relationship that the Committee feels that I should have declared.

Despite the above, the Committee found my technical breaches to have been serious and called for prompt action by the House. However, as I have said consistently, no Committee member attempted to explain why the breaches were deemed serious or what exactly was meant by the word "serious". I was present at the debate, but I was silenced: I was told that to be allowed to stay in the Chamber for the debate I had to give a verbal undertaking that I would not ask any questions, that I would not make any interventions and that I would not challenge anything that was said by another hon. Member after I had sat down, when I was allowed to make not a speech, but a statement which had to be uncontroversial and would be heard in silence.

Furthermore, there was little or no precedent of a similar case, other than that of the infamous trial of the late Lord Boothby. The precedent of some 400 similar declarations made by other hon. Members in which overseas earnings could have been expected as normal, but in which none were declared, are shown clearly on page 67 in question 644 of the report. That was completely ignored by the Select Committee.

The Select Committee's findings should be contrasted with the findings of the same Select Committee in the subsequent cases of the hon. Members for Surrey, North-West (Sir M. Grylls), for East Hampshire (Mr.

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Mates), and for Workington. All were found to have transgressed, but no action was recommended by the House. In the latter case, the hon. Member for Workington was found repeatedly and deliberately to have disobeyed a specific rule on Members' interests. However, he was a member of the Select Committee to whom the Chairman had referred in the debate on 7 March as being "so useful to us on the Committee"—[*Official Report*, 7 March 1990; Vol. 168, c. 901.]

In *Hansard* at column 897, the Leader of the House urges the House constantly to heed precedent in dealing with such cases. The precedent in my case has never been followed, even in the case of deliberate transgression. Does that even sound like justice, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

I now turn to some coincidences—some very strange coincidences. The first was the strange matching findings of the Committee report with my libel case. As has been said, the journalist Mr. David Leigh had written some highly damaging articles about me during the general election of 1987. I and my solicitors felt that they were highly libellous. Writs were issued and Mr. Leigh has been successfully sued for libel by other Conservative Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), and by Sir Stephen Hastings, Military Cross. We felt that he had made another mistake—this time a big one—on which very substantial damages were due.

During the Committee hearings, it amazed me that the hon. Member for Workington was allowed by the Chairman, the hon. Member for Wealden, to ask questions about this sub judice libel case—report pages 42 and 43, questions 301 to 317. I understand that mention of a sub judice case is not normally allowed by Mr. Speaker. The intensity with which the hon. Member for Workington pressed his questions was also of considerable concern, as was his strong objection—report question 282—to my consulting with my lawyer. He asked me repeatedly not about the substance of the cases but, most strangely—as if it were of great importance—whether or not I intended to pursue these libel cases. This appeared to be of paramount interest, although it did not relate in any way to the rules on the declaration of Members' interests.

I must stress that these two cases—SAMA and Chidiac—on which the Select Committee found me to have committed serious errors were the very same two cases on which I had current, potentially massive libel suits against Mr. Leigh, the complainant. As a result of the Select Committee hearings, these two libel cases were rendered untenable. This very strange coincidence is even more alarming when one reads early-day motion 1210 and when one hears this boast from the hon. Member for Workington.

After the report was published, the hon. Member for Workington spoke to me in the House outside Committee Room 13. He was amazingly friendly considering the circumstances. He told me that my case had got out of hand, and that the Committee was really after some much bigger and more serious cases involving some very senior Conservatives. He said that the masses of paper produced by my ex-wife made mine a good case to start with as a trend-setter. He than urged me to apologise in the debate, saying that if I did, he and his friends would not vote against me. He added,

"Where I come from, you don't kick a man when he's down."

In the event, he did vote against me despite my apology. He then added a much more sinister comment which should gravely concern all hon. Members. In response to my observation that of all the complaints, I was amazed to be found in error on the SAMA and Chidiac questions, he replied:

"Look, you had libel suits out on those two complaints and I couldn't allow my friend to hang with a million pound suit. That's why I pressed you hard on that point when we took evidence. You should have dropped it."

In other words, had I yielded to his pressure in the Select Committee hearings—report questions 301 to 317 on pages 42 and 43—my case would not even have been pursued, let alone to a show trial in this Chamber. Does this disturb you, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Could it be that an hon. Member on the Select Committee had set out from the beginning to get his friend, the complainant Mr. David Leigh, off the hook of a massive libel settlement, and to do so had perpetrated a massive and deliberate injustice in the form of a frame-up against another hon. Member, albeit of a different political persuasion?

When this evidence was put to the Select Committee on Members' Interests, it refused out of hand to hear the case, giving no reasons whatever. Here I want to quote the return letter I got, having sent the case to the Select Committee.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman referred to the fact that he had a writ out against David Leigh of *The Observer*. He has said many times that it was a massive writ and that he was going to make a lot of money. So it was like game, set and match. He goes before the Select Committee which is dominated by Tory Members, not by Labour Members, and with a Tory Chairman. Let us get things in perspective. The hon. Gentleman gives the impression that a Machiavellian Member, my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), has somehow got all those Tory Members round his little finger. The hon. Gentleman claims that, as a result, he cannot pursue his writ. What happened to that massive writ? If the hon. Gentleman had such a first-class case, what happened to it? How much money did he get? If he did not pursue it, why did he not do so if he had all the cards stacked on his side?

Mr. Browne: First, talking about the massive Conservative majority on the Committee——

Mr. Skinner: Well, there is.

Mr. Browne: Absolutely right—the hon. Gentleman is right. However I am sure that he has heard of the Whips Office. Indeed, his own Whip, the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) is sitting close to him. It is a point that I have already made in the debate. Regarding the writ, it would be impossible in my lawyers' view once the House had given its ruling. It was tough enough to get any court in the land to rule on an internal matter of the House of Commons concerning House of Commons rules. That was a dangerous thing. It was going to be tough. But when the House of Commons Select Committee on Members' Interests had made the ruling it did, the case was absolutely untenable.

The letter that I got back from the Committee, dated 27 March 1991, said:

"Dear Mr. Browne. In accordance with the procedure laid down by the House on 22 May 1974, I referred your letter of 14 March 1991 containing a complaint against Mr. Campbell-Savours to the Committee.

The Committee have asked me to say that they did not wish to proceed with the matter, and returned your letter to me. Signed A. J. Hastings, Registrar and Clerk of the Committee."

Surely the Select Committee should normally have been expected to express keen interest in investigating a potential wrongdoing by one of its own members of such gravity and moment. Does this disturb you, Mr. Deputy Speaker? This strange matching of Select Committee findings with my libel case is the strangest coincidence of all in this saga of intrigue.

I now turn to the strange precision of the Committee's findings themselves. The precisely convenient drafting of the findings of the House of Commons Select Committee was quite extraordinary. The Select Committee's findings allowed the Conservative Whips to guarantee me one of two totally opposed options: either a take-note motion with no punishment whatever, or a motion to punish me in an extreme manner. Does it raise your eyebrows, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that those findings of the Select Committee allowed both options to be put by the Government Whips?

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) got a more severe punishment for what he did with the Mace.

Mr. Browne: The hon. Gentleman says that another hon. Member got a similar punishment, I think for dropping the Mace.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman is talking about having suffered an extreme penalty. The Committee, with its massive Tory majority, decided on a vote that the hon. Gentleman should be expelled for 20 days. My hon. Friend the Member for Leith touched the Mace one night and was kicked out for three months. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) was thrown out because he had the guts to say that the Prime Minister of the day was lying. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), who has just come into the Chamber, was thrown out because he held up proceedings on the Budget for about five minutes.

I ask hon. Members to reflect on the situation. This bloke pocketed £88,000, did not put it in the Register in the proper manner, and is now whingeing. He is still a Member of Parliament and has been picking up his money all the time, as well as massive sums from various companies. Yet he claims to have suffered an extreme penalty. He is in trouble because the Tory heirarchy have put the knife in his back.

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for mentioning at least one point. Perhaps the House does not view a 20-day suspension as an extreme punishment, but outside this House, the concept is viewed as a very extreme punishment, and it does enormous damage.

The Select Committee's findings allowed the Conservative Whips to guarantee me either a take-note motion with no punishment whatever, or a motion to punish me in an extreme manner. I hope that you will forgive those, Mr. Speaker, who see the possibility—I put it no higher at this stage—of collusion. The House investigations may show more, new and additional proof than the recordings that I have on the subject.

A reference in the book on Lord Boothby by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge makes an interesting comparison. Evidently Lord Boothby, when a Member of this House, was fixed by the very same mechanism, in which the Conservative Whips played a most active part in the running of the Select Committee. That active role of the Conservative Whips in important issues concerning Select Committee has recently been evidenced again by the sudden change of heart on the part of the Select Committee on Health in toning down its report of July 1991.

Even to this day the Whips Office appears to be playing a crucial role. When, on the written recommendation of the present Prime Minister, I went to the present Chief Whip, the right hon. Member for Mid Norfolk (Mr. Ryder), to ask for help over my appeal to the House, the door was slammed shut: "It is for the Leader of the House alone—you cannot expect any help from me," he said. Later in the conversation he said, "If you do not stand down at the next election, I will use all the resources at my command against you."

That appears already to have started, for there have been more unannounced ministerial visits to my constituency in the last six months than in the previous 12 years. Now, even the selected candidate—the candidate selected by my local association to run against me—threatens, if press reports are correct, that no fewer than six Ministers, and even the Prime Minister, will come to speak for him in the election campaign if I do not stand down. It sounds almost as though a by-election is to take place in Winchester.

Only two days ago an article appeared in the *Daily Express* saying that the Whips Office had said that I should have declared an interest called the John Browne foundation. I hereby say that no such foundation existed or exists, now or at any time. So the letter is about a non-existent foundation that I am supposed to have registered. I called the Chief Whip about it, but instead of offering to investigate the matter urgently, he wanted to hear none of it, saying that it was a matter for the pairing Whip rather than for him. Washed hands.

The third extraordinary coincidence to which I must refer is that of timing of the House of Commons debate on 7 March and the timing of a meeting of my executive on the same day. My constituency association, under the chairmanship of Mrs. Felicity Hindson, who was once chairman of the women's advisory committee of the then Leader of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), arranged for a special meeting of the Winchester executive to take place in a village hall, rather than in Winchester, on the very evening of 7 March 1990. The cost of the hall was £29·50—not much to lose if the meeting was cancelled.

That meeting was heavily supervised by Conservative Central Office, in the person of the area agent, Mr. Donald Stringer—the same Mr. Stringer, who, I understand, managed the selection process in Cheltenham and was consulted about the famous letter of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), now Secretary of State for the Environment, when he wrote to his executive. By a quite extraordinary coincidence, the then Leader of the House, a friend of my chairman, arranged for the debate on my interests to be held at precisely the same time, on the afternoon and evening of 7 March 1990. He announced that fact publicly on Thursday 1 March at

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business question time. Mrs. Hindson who has subsequently been awarded the MBE—after only two years as constituency chairman—made no attempt to change the timing of the Winchester executive meeting to enable me to attend, or to allow those especially keen members of my executive to watch my trial on television, despite the fact that she had had secret advance warning of an ambush motion to be put by a Brigadier Lanyon at that special executive meeting to recommend the opening of reselection procedures. Mrs. Hindson finally admitted to that prior knowledge over a year later, under heavy questioning from the floor of the Winchester annual general meeting, on 25 April 1991. Furthermore, under the Winchester association rule 18(2) (c), she was obliged to keep me fully informed on matters of parliamentary candidature. In this case, I was kept totally in the dark.

The result of those conflicting meetings—of my constituency executive and in the Chamber—was that I was unable to explain to my executive my objection in principle to the whole idea of reselection. I maintain that it is a socialist phenomenon tending to make Members of Parliament more like delegates of a few senior party officials rather than the representatives of their constituents. In my absence, the meeting in my constituency was persuaded that reselection would be greatly to my advantage, as it would wipe the slate clean of all the problems that I faced in the media.

Mr. Skinner: Did you fall for that?

Mr Browne: I was not even asked to fall for it because I had to be here to make my statement. My point is that I was not even there. So the real question is whether the members attending the meeting fell for it.

Owing to my firmly held beliefs, I did not submit my name for reselection, as a matter of principle. On the other hand, as I did not submit to the unconstitutional pressure brought on me, as mentioned in early-day motion 1211, I did not stand down. The result is now total chaos in my constituency. With a Conservative ex-Whip as the official candidate, there are serious splits and extremely low morale. My constituency has now been placed in jeopardy with the prospect of two Father Christmases at the next general election.

I come to the subject of unconstitutional pressure.

Mr. Fraser: I am curious. The hon. Gentleman said tht the chairperson of his constituency party got her MBE after being chair for only two years. What is the tariff in the Tory party for an MBE?

Mr. Browne: The tariff that I have seen is that if one is chairman of a constituency association for three years and then president for three years, one has about a one in four chance of getting an MBE. The person in question had been chairman for about a year and a half, and suddenly out of the blue an MBE came winging its way. I tried to find who had recommended it, and on what grounds, but all information was tightly sealed.

I turn to the subject of unconstitutional pressure. According to the Chief Whip, the Select Committee report was leaked to him by a Committee member just over a week before it was published on 9 February 1990. I do not personally believe that it was leaked in that way, but none the less that is what I was told.

From that moment on, senior officers of state clearly sought to pervert the course of justice. Although numbed by the media onslaught, I was put under the greatest pressure to stand down at the next election, in return for a Government guarantee that I would not be punished in any way. I was told that I must stand down—not immediately, thus causing an embarrassing by-election, but at the next general election. The precision of the House Select Committee findings allowed all three of those options.

I was told that if I agreed to stand down I would not be punished in any way, and that sympathetic and even laudatory speeches would be made about me from the Government Front Bench and from some Back Bench supporters. The House would pass a take-note motion, with no punishment. I would then be assured of a very easy time regarding late night votes, and pairing until the next general election and would be positively considered——

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 11 (Friday sittings).*

Fishery Decommissioning Scheme

11 am

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the fishery decommissioning scheme he announced on 27 February.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Gummer): I refer the hon. Member to my pursuant reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) yesterday evening. I explained that my fellow Fisheries Ministers and I are proposing a programme of closely linked measures to reduce the over-fishing which is posing serious problems for many stocks vital to the long-term future of our fishing industry. You will remember, Mr. Speaker, that I have pointed out on numerous occasions that there is no way in which we can safeguard the future of our present fishermen and of their sons and daughters without serious conservation moves.

The object of the proposed programme will be to reduce fishing effort over the period up to 1996. An essential feature of the programme will be the introduction of direct controls on fishing effort. Initially, we plan to freeze effort in 1993 at its 1991 level, with the permitted level of effort then decreasing in 1994 to 1996. How much we will have to reduce effort will depend, in part, on the outcome of forthcoming European Community discussions about the 1992-96 multi-annual guidance programme and, partly, on the impact of the other measures that we also propose to introduce.

The other proposed measures include a decommissioning scheme to operate over two years with provision for expenditure of up to £25 million. That scheme will be cash-limited and subject to tight controls and will be designed to take out the maximum amount of fishing effort. No decommissioning payments will be committed until measures to control and reduce fishing effort are in place, which we intend to seek to achieve in 1993.

In addition, we are proposing changes in our quota management and licence transfer rules, so as to encourage fish producers' organisations to play a more active part in rationalising the fleet and to increase the pressure to reduce the size of the fleet. Further, we intend to extend restrictive licensing to vessels of 10 m and below in length so as to prevent expansion in this sector of the fleet undermining the effectiveness of our other measures. Finally, we propose to make it possible for fishermen to trade their days at sea entitlements along with fishing licences.

We shall shortly be consulting the European Community Commission and the fishing industry about the details of this important conservation package. When parliamentary time permits, the Government will introduce the primary legislation that will be needed for some elements of the package, such as the arrangements of trading days at sea entitlements.

My right hon. Friends and I are putting this important programme forward now following a series of discussions with industry interests, in which we have made it clear that we would be prepared to introduce a further decommissioning scheme only as part of a package that would have real conservation benefits. The package is a careful combination of payments to industry, encouragement to voluntary action and some compulsory effort reduction. Reducing fishing effort is crucial to the long-term interests of our fishermen as well as the fish stocks. We look forward to constructive discussions with the industry about our proposals.

Mr. Salmond: That is a useful statement from the Minister, bacause it contrasts sharply with the bullish assessment given by the Scottish Office yesterday evening. Can the Minister tell the House whether the funding proposed for the decommissioning scheme is fully comparable with that which has been available to other European fleets in the past few years, and if not why not? Can he specify exactly what extensions to the tie-up regulations he is proposing? If he is going in for transferable, viable and sellable quotas, how will he avoid the concentration of ownership in a few hands in the fishing industry, to the detriment of the family-run industry in Scotland?

Would the Minister be prepared to join me in appealing to the chairmen of all the major clearing banks to suspend repossessions of fishing boats until it can be worked out whether the scheme will help fishermen in that position to leave the industry with dignity?

Finally, does the Minister have no sense of shame or regret about his obduracy and his role in stopping such a scheme during the past few years and causing so much grief and heartache in our fishing communities?

Mr. Gummer: You will have noticed, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Gentleman did not mention the word "conservation" once during his questions. One of the serious sadnesses of the discussions is that the Scottish nationalists appear to think that the only thing that we need to do is to hand out money to people and not to protect the stocks. Again and again I have asked for the Scottish nationalists' support for conservation. On every occasion they have refused to do anything to seek it, except to demand that taxpayers' money should be paid, without question, for the decommissioning scheme.

First, I am not going to compare this scheme with any other. I would not have given the private notice question the title which the hon. Member suggested. The most important thing about the scheme is that it is intended further to conserve stocks of fish, to conserve the Scottish, English, Welsh and Northern Irish fishing industries for today and tomorrow. I am sad that the Scottish nationalists have not joined me in that.

I have only one sense of shame—shame that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan has not taken the opportunity to thank us for this package.

I am also sad that the industry has not introduced the package, but I respect the large number of fishermen who will fully support the package, which is the right balance between asking the industry to make a substantial contribution—which is what I have been asking for for 18 months—both in the new job of the fish producers' organisations, which will be able to play a part in decommissioning, and in the fact that there will be further tie-ups. I have tried to create a situation in which there are only so many days at sea. We shall freeze that effort, as I suggested in 1991, from the beginning of 1993 and we shall reduce the effort, as is necessary to conserve stocks.

I repeat that the intention of the scheme is to conserve stocks. The idea of trading days at sea entitlement is to give some flexibility between fishermen all over the United Kingdom. It is something that fishermen in Scotland will

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especially welcome, because it will mean that they will be able to adapt their fishing according to their needs in a way which would not otherwise have been available to them.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): These measures will be warmly welcomed by my fishermen in Fleetwood, especially as my right hon. Friend has taken on board the need for a decommissioning scheme to be part of an overall protection package. Is my right hon. Friend prepared to introduce that decommissioning scheme, provided that agreement is reached with the rest of the industry on other protection measures?

Secondly, will my right hon. Friend say more clearly what he is proposing to do about licensing of boats of less than 10 m? Finally, will the scheme that he has proposed encourage a newer, smaller fleet and encourage some of the older vessels to leave the fleet?

Mr. Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. The intention is to conserve stocks for the present and future. It is unlikely that the conservation measures that I have outlined will be agreed by the Commission and be in place in the fishing ports in advance of the dates that I have suggested. However, I shall certainly look at my hon. Friend's proposition. I cannot encourage him, simply because, having realised how complex a matter it is, I think that his aim is unlikely to be achieved.

In all the talks that I have had with representatives of the fishing industry, it has been clear that they have taken an increasingly serious view of the need to restrict efforts. I am pleased that the general tone of the fishing industry has been to welcome the sort of package that we have put together and presaged in a series of debates, both in the House and elsewhere. I shall certainly consider the other points raised by my hon. Friend to see whether there is any further action that we can take.

As for the licensing of smaller boats, the intention is to meet a demand of the fishing industry, members of which have become more and more concerned that the 10m boats and below are increasingly fishing stocks, so that they are unavailable to the more professional fishermen. Some such boats are very professional and keep just below the limit. I do not want that to continue. Such action is particularly prevalent in fishing ports such as my hon. Friend's, where times have been extremely difficult.

I very much respect those who have stuck to their guns and determined to keep fishing. They have felt that their stocks had been purloined by those fishermen not subject to the same restrictions. In future, those fishermen shall be so subject.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does the Minister agree that such a matter would have been more appropriate for an oral statement than for a written answer and the chance of a private notice question?

Approximately what proportion of existing fishing vessels over a certain length are likely to be decommissioned as a result of the scheme? Will the Minister assure the House that he believes that there is an equivalence of surveillance of catchings, as distinct from landings, of fish throughout the EEC? Will he enlighten us as to why, twice yesterday at—column 1118 in answer to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), and at column 1123 in answer to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond)—the Leader of the House said that there would not be a statement, despite the accusation that the matter was imminent?

Does not the fact that the subject occurs in columns *612-13* of *Hansard*, published in the early hours of this morning, and was issued to the press at 5 pm yesterday, mean that the Government are at sixes and sevens with the House and the fishing public on this vital issue?

Mr. Gummer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. The likelihood is that the proposal might reach about 12 per cent. of the fleet. The decommissioning part of the plan is only one part of it, and the earlier part of my statement is perhaps the most important, as it commits the Government and the fishing industry to a significant restriction on effort in order to protect the future, by protecting the stocks. The hon. Gentleman will know that the United Kingdom has the largest proportion of fishing stocks in the European Community. It is perfectly true that, due to that fact, our surveillance is tougher, better and more extensive than any other Community country.

I want to improve the surveillance that other countries have over their boats. Therefore, it was my job when I was Minister of State successfully to press the Commission to set up an inspectorate of inspectors and extend that inspectorate on the second occasion. I hope that we shall improve that further, as there is no doubt that the Commission has complimented the United Kingdom on the quality, extent and integrity of its surveillance. We shall continue to uphold those standards in this country. We hope to spread them to the rest of the Community.

As to the comments of my right hon. Friend, he knew that I would produce a statement as quickly as possible. He did not know that I would be able to do so as quickly as I did. My speed surprised even myself.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): When my right hon. Friend the Minister came to Norfolk last year, he will have heard some of the problems of the Wash shell fishermen who are concerned about conservation, and conserving stocks of shrimps, cockles, whelks and mussels. The Minister will have heard about how the industry plays a crucial part in the local economy. He will also be aware of the concern about the EC shellfish directive and various closure orders in the Wash, and about the threat of larger boats coming into the Wash and fishing for the inshore stock.

To what extent will today's statement affect the inshore Wash shell fishery? Could we include in today's proposals measures to alleviate the problems caused by large boats coming in and taking the stock that local fishermen believe to be theirs?

Mr. Gummer: I very much understand what my hon. Friend has said, not least because I, like him, have a fishing constituency with a proportionately large number of fishermen who are longshoremen and have precisely those problems, although the species are different. I do not believe that we can take measures under the proposals specifically to address my hon. Friend's concerns, but I am looking at ways in which the present system bears upon the smaller fishermen, particularly in relation to shellfish, where there are real worries.

May I correct an answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing)—*[Interruption.]* There is no need to worry—I shall state absolutely clearly that it would be more accurate to answer

the question about the effect of decommissioning to say that we think that 10 per cent. of effort will be removed by the decommissioning as it stands.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): Does the Minister recognise that for all of us, from all quarters, who have been pressing long and hard for the Government to concede the principle of decommissioning, the Government's concession—their deathbed conversion—is welcome? But the industry's suspicions are likely to be aroused by the uncharacteristic reluctance of this Minister, of all Ministers, to come to the House to tell us of his departmental activities?

Will the right hon. Gentleman clarify the statement issued by the Secretary of State for Scotland yesterday, when he spoke of the £25 million that was to be put into decommissioning? Is the entire decommissioning scheme to be Government funded, or will it involve an anticipated contribution from the industry? Will he take this opportunity to respond to the anxiety felt on both coastlines in the north of Scotland—that of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and mine —over the repossessions currently taking place? Will he influence the respective chairmen of the clearing banks involved to urge them not to proceed with that policy?

In his announcement, the Minister placed emphasis on the other measures—tie-up days, transferrable licences and so on. When he quite properly speaks of the need for continuing constructive discussions with the industry, will he bear in mind the particular problems that such measures pose for smaller fishing communities? Will he consider the lack of support that those measures have generated within some sectors of the fishing industry?

Mr. Gummer: I acknowledge that, in contradistinction to others, the hon. Gentleman has always made a major point about conservation and has always accepted that it had to be part of any scheme that we proposed. It is perhaps unfair of him to suggest that we had to concede the principle, as I accepted it 18 months ago, but on the condition that there was a substantial contribution by the industry. The Government's contribution is £25 million, most of which will be paid by the British taxpayer. The industry's contribution is a serious one and there will be a heavier weight attached to it due to conservation reasons and tie-up days.

In future we shall provide fish producer organisations with the ability to discover in what spheres they may seek to rationalise their own local problems at their expense. That will not be enforced, but will take the form of voluntary action if they are prepared to do so. The whole industry will be affected by the more general conservation measures that will arise partly due to the extension of the licensing of boats of 10 m and below.

That is the industry contribution and it is the one with which I hoped that it would come forward. All the elements of that contribution have been suggested by those within the industry who are concerned about it. I think that it strikes the right balance. In the past, the hon. Member has suggested that he was not unwilling to see such a balance achieved. The £25 million is the Government contribution and there is no question of taxing or raising money from the industry to contribute to that.

I very much agree with what the hon. Member said about smaller communities. Unless we do something significant about conservation, it is those communities which will be most obviously affected. The hon. Gentleman will know from his part of the United Kingdom how much antagonism between communities has arisen because of the shortage of fish. It has not been a pretty sight to see the way in which different parts of Scotland, let alone Scotland and England, and different parts of England have argued among themselves because of the extremely limited amount of fish available. I hope that the proposed scheme will help those communities in the long run. I shall consider carefully the way in which the burdens of that scheme fall upon individual small communities. I have such communities in my constituency and I understand their concerns.

The tie-up is difficult, but it is better to have a tie-up under the current proposals than under the unsatisfactory proposals that were previously forced upon us by the Commission—even after we had changed them to an extent. The much more flexible proposals were British initiated and they were hard-fought for by the Parliamentary Secretary and myself. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that they are a great improvement.

I shall talk to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland about specific examples of repossessions. If the hon. Gentleman or any of his hon. Friends wish to inform me of particular cases I would be happy to take them up individually.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this issue is a matter of balance? The answer my right hon. Friend has given strikes the right balance between the short-term interests of the fishermen and the long-term issue of conservation. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Scottish National party should recognise that unless we preserve the fish stocks, there will not be any fishermen in the future?

Mr. Gummer: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am sad that this is not a matter of universal agreement in the House. The written answer that I gave yesterday seemed to me to be so obviously a balanced one that it could not cause any kind of controversy. The fact that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) seeks to make it controversial shows that, once again, conservation that costs something—all effective conservation does—is not something that the Scottish National party is ever prepared to support.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The Minister has placed you, Mr. Speaker in an invidious position today, whereby you felt that you had to grant a private notice question because this is the first opportunity to ask questions following the statement published this morning in *Hansard*. I believe that the statement made at the Dispatch Box today is designed to snooker my hon. Friends with responsibilities for fisheries who are unable to be here today because they are busily involved in constituency engagements. What the right hon. Gentleman has done is a breach of parliamentary faith and that is wrong.

What will be the position of the small boats of less than 10 m that will be decommissioned? Will they be destroyed? Will they be burnt, broken up or put to alternative use? Is it possible that some of those boats could be used as part

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of Britain's aid programme and sent to overseas countries where they could be put to good use in underprivileged fishing communities?

I give the statement a cautious welcome. I should like to know how it will precisely impact on communities such as my own of Maryport in my constituency. To find the answer I shall have to make contact with some of my fishing colleagues, such as Mr. Madine and Mr. Harold Musgrove, who is a Maryport resident. They will quickly inform me of the value of this particular statement. Therefore, although I give a cautious welcome to the statement, I reserve some judgment on it.

Mr. Gummer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his cautious welcome, and I should be happy to talk to him about the specific problems of Maryport—an area which faces difficult economic problems in any case. Obviously I hope that my statement will make a contribution, at least in the medium term, to the resources and abilities of his constituents to fish.

I suspect that the hon. Gentleman's fishermen will tell him that the announcement is good as far as it goes, but that they wish that the burden of conservation did not have to be borne by them. That is one of our problems. We are asking today's fishermen to take on a considerable burden, because of the over-fishing of the past, to provide for real fishing in the future. I recognise that fishermen find that extremely difficult, and it is for that reason that I believe that the significant sum of taxpayers' money should be part of the deal. I hope that the hon. Gentleman's fishermen will find that satisfactory.

I do not believe that I put you, Mr. Speaker, in any difficult position, but, if I had done so, I would have been the first to apologise. I do not believe that to be the case, because the private notice question technique is a standard part of the House's methods of communication. The hon. Gentleman was able to put his question and I was able to answer it. I, too, had constituency engagements today, but if others had wished to be here, I am sure that they could have been present.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is there not another reason why this statement has been made this morning in answer to a private notice question? It is because the right hon. Gentleman has been locked in mortal combat with the Scottish Office, and other sections of the Tory party, for the past three years.

There is another way of looking at this statement. It is not all sunshine, because the right hon. Gentleman has really said that we shall have fewer fishermen and fewer boats getting fish and that the price of fish will go up. We are a maritime nation, an island in the Common Market, but ever since we went into that tinpot Common Market, our fishermen have been told that they cannot catch as much fish as they did before, because it must be surrendered to the other 11 EC countries. A number of hon. Members have complimented the Minister today. What for? He is being complimented for sacking people, stopping them working and throwing them on the dole. What a carry-on.

Mr. Gummer: The House will have noticed the hon. Member's eloquent support for Labour party policy on the EEC——

Mr. Skinner: I am not surrendering to the Germans.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman appears to be fighting battles long over.

Mr. Skinner: I will win in the end.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gummer: He does so with scant connection with the facts. The problem is not our Community partners, but the fish. I know that the hon. Gentleman's constituency is far removed from the sea——

Mr. Skinner: We have to buy fish.

Mr. Gummer: The reason that there is a shortage of fish is not the European Community but the fact that we have over-fished in the past. We have the largest amount of European fish and it is our over-fishing, as well as that of others, that has caused the problem.

It would be wrong to suggest that we can blame this problem on others. We have fished too much and we must hold back on our fishing. We will do so to give our next generation the opportunity to fish in what is the largest sector of EC fisheries. Thank goodness we have a common fisheries policy, because that is the only effective safeguard for the conservation of our fish stocks.

The hon. Gentleman is fighting long-lost battles, and the sadness about it is that he misleads the House by suggesting that an alternative policy would reap any better results.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): Will the Minister accept that his statement this morning that he will talk to Labour Members or to the Secretary of State for Scotland will not help the immediate repossessions that we are seeing now and that will come about later in the year in the fishing industry? It is not just a problem for Scotland—it exists in Redcar and up the north-east coast, in the constituencies of many of my hon. Friends. Will he make a commitment to talk to the clearing banks about the difficulty, because next year, as he and I know, will be too late for many of those fisheries people?

Mr. Gummer: In case others are not aware of this, I should make it clear that, although the specific cases which no doubt the hon. Lady would like to bring to my attention, although she has not done so so far—I do not believe that I have had a letter from her asking for support on this——

Ms. Mowlam: It is not up to the Minister; the clearing banks make the decisions.

Mr. Gummer: If the hon. Lady has a particular case that she wants me to take up, I have always shown myself extremely willing to talk to Members of Parliament about individual cases. The hon. Lady has not so far contacted me, but if she were willing to do so, I could take it up with the clearing bank concerned.

In general, the fishing industry's returns have kept up with inflation, because, although the numbers of fish that have been taken are smaller, as the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has told us, the price of fish has also risen. Therefore, it is untrue to say that the fishing industry overall is enduring general repossessions. There may be individual cases, and in those cases I am happy to do whatever I can to help. If the hon. Lady has such a case

—it will of course be in England, as her constituency is in England and will therefore be my responsibility—I should be happy to take it up at the moment that she gives me the details.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): To pick up a point made by the Minister, my hon. Friends who normally speak on the fishing industry are in their constituencies. My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) is 300 miles away, and my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) is 200 miles away. They are absent not only because of the assurances given by the Leader of the House yesterday but because of the assurances given late yesterday by the private offices of Ministers that a statement on this matter would not be made in the near future. I hope that the Minister will take this opportunity to apologise for that information, which came directly from his Department.

Is the Minister aware that the Labour party generally welcomes the decommissioning scheme that he has announced? He should not be surprised at that, because Labour colleagues both north and south of the border have been pressing for this action for many years. We recognise that a balance has to be struck between guaranteeing the livelihood of those involved in fishing today and conserving stock for the fishing communities of tomorrow—the whole principle of sustainable development that I wish was introduced in other Departments.

Does the Minister think that the £25 million that he has announced—there seems to be some confusion about the amount of reduction in capacity that that will bring—is adequate to deal with the problem? How does he react to the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations, which believes the sum to be inadequate?

Does the Minister agree that had this scheme been introduced two years ago, as the Labour party demanded, there would have been greater stability in the fishing industry today and we could have avoided the need for the other and more draconian restrictions that the Minister also announced today? Is it not a fact that this is a cynical deathbed conversion, which has more to do with the date of the election than with the Minister's concern with the fishing industry?

Mr. Gummer: This scheme could not have been introduced two years ago, because the arrangements under which the European Community operated would not have given us the opportunities to take the conservation measures that we now have.—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady has asked a question and I will answer it politely. She will then no doubt be able to intervene if she thinks that I have not answered it adequately.

In the past 18 months, we have spent a great deal of time working in the European Community to get the system that makes possible what I announced yesterday. That is why it could not have been done or announced before. In any case, the reason for the announcement at this time has to do with the agreement that we have to enter with the European Community about our multi-annual guidance programme targets.

We now know that our fleet will overshoot those targets and we have to negotiate with the Commission on the basis of what target we should have, how we will keep our fleet within those targets and the effort within those targets over the period 1992-96. The hon. Lady does not normally speak on this subject, so she will understand if I say this directly—this is the timing that is inevitable given the European Community's timing.

As to the hon. Lady's colleagues, I have made no further announcement today that was not clearly put in the answer to the written question that I gave last night. I am answering this private notice question today—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady wants an answer and can no doubt return on the matter if she wishes to. Her synthetic anger will be seen by all. There is a private notice question today and I am answering it. Every hon. Member who is present has seen that I have given no further information than that which was already in the hands of the House in the perfectly sensible, public answer to a written question which I made yesterday.

The hon. Lady said that the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations thinks that this amount of money is inadequate. I suspect that, whatever figure had been placed on this, those who are the recipients would have liked more. I believe that this is the right balance and I should like to thank her for her willingness to say that, if there is to be a decommissioning scheme, it must be part of a package. However, the difference is that that is a balance which we have achieved, which she has supported but which, up to now, her hon. Friends have not pressed for. Like so many others, they are keen on emphasising the scheme that puts money into people's pockets without accepting the other half, which is very tough, which the fishermen recognise and with which I concern myself because it is hard for them.

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Your name has been mentioned in relation to embarrassment; I would not know whether that is so and I would not ask. However, is it not clear from the exchanges that we have just had that certain hon. Members, including those on the Opposition Front Bench, have been embarrassed today by the turn of events? You will have just heard my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) ask for an apology from the Minister. You will know that, yesterday, when he was asked whether a statement was imminent, the Leader of the House—no doubt in good faith, because I know him—said:

"I am not yet in a position to say when conclusions will be reached."—[*Official Report*, 27 February 1992; Vol. 204, c. 1118.]

You will know, Mr. Speaker, that at that very moment an envelope must have been on the way to give the hon. Gentleman who had asked the written question his answer. Therefore, is it not a fact that there has been a breach of order or of courtesy and that some apology is required? The Minister has not yet given it. Can we ask whether the apology is due from the Leader of the House—I do not think that it is, knowing his general conduct—or from the Minister of Fisheries—I think that it might be—whose conduct we have just witnessed?

Mr. Speaker: This is a private Members' day, and there are other motions on the Order Paper. I was not embarrassed by this matter. I consider private notice questions on their merits, and that is the basis on which I granted the private notice question today.

Mr. Gummer: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It would not be in my nature to be curmudgeonly.

[Mr. Gummer]

If any hon. Member feels that he could have been better served by me or my Ministry, I am sorry that he does feel so. I shall try to ensure that he does not feel so in future.

Mr. Speaker: After that handsome apology, I do not think that there is anything more to be said.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I wonder whether you might comment, Mr. Speaker, on what happened yesterday. The Leader of the House gave——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have already said that I cannot comment. It is not for me to comment on these matters. As I have said, this is a private Members' motions day. The hon. Member knows—he has often been in this position himself—that it would be unfair to take up time with points of order that I cannot answer.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: At the same time that the Leader of the House was telling the House that there would be no answer, a letter was winging its way to an hon. Member including a parliamentary answer that was entirely at variance with an undertaking being given by the Leader of the House. Surely that shows that there was some congestion in Whitehall.

In your ruling, Mr. Speaker, you said that you consider whether a private notice question is important enough to be granted. There is an additional factor that you are required to take into account, and that is whether it is the first opportunity to raise the matter. Will you confirm, Mr. Speaker, that this is the first opportunity to raise the matter and that only on this day would you be prepared to grant the private notice question? If an hon. Member such as myself had come to you on Monday, you would have said, "The first opportunity was last Friday." Is it not clear, therefore, that there was very little that you could do other than allow the private notice question today, given that the answer was given yesterday and published in *Hansard* this morning? Is not that the reality?

Mr. Speaker: Of course that is true. The hon. Member correctly states the criteria against which I judge applications for private notice questions.

Members' Interests

Question again proposed.

11.41 am

Mr. John Browne: As I was saying Mr. Speaker, I was told that, if I did agree to stand down at the next general election, I would not be punished in any way. In fact, sympathetic and even laudatory speeches would be made about me from the Government Front Bench and from Government Back Bench supporters. The House would pass a take-note motion, and there would be no punishment. I would then be assured of an easy time here with regard to late nights, pairing and so on, until the next election. I would be positively considered for any Committees or overseas visits for which I applied. On the other hand, if I did not submit, I could rest assured that the House would pass a hostile motion involving severe punishment.

That offer was entirely unconstitutional, in that it denied the rights of my constituents to vote either for or against their sitting Member at the next general election. When I asked, "What about my constituents?", I was told by the party chairman, "Do not worry about your constituents." But I do worry about my constituents and their rights, over those of party officials, to hire and fire hon. Members of the House.

This is a fundamental pillar of democracy. Surely we want hon. Members to be answerable to their constituents, and thereby to serve the interests of their constituents rather than those of party officials. We do not wish Members of the House to be answerable to, and thereby to become the private delegates of, a few party officials. Is that not what our British democracy is all about? Surely that should be a matter of concern to all right hon. and hon. Members of the House.

Worse still, what happened was one of the gravest possible abuses of judicial power. Pressure was put upon me by some of the most powerful people in the land—namely, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East who is not only a Queen's Counsel of the High Court of England, but was then Leader of the House, in charge of the business of the House, and, as Foreign Secretary, had been in charge of MI6; the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), who, as Home Secretary, is in charge of MI5; and the right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex, who was in charge of the Government Whips Office.

With such great power wielded with impunity against the flow of justice, what man or women in our land can consider himself or herself safe from an individual purge for political reasons? Under such circumstances, when the Government call for silence, it is indeed the silence of the lambs. Does that not worry you, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

That illicit pressure was placed on me at a series of well-recorded meetings held in the Chief Whip's Office and the offices of the Leader of the House and of the party chairman. Interestingly, some of those meetings are not even recorded in the official diaries of the Ministers concerned. One meeting was so secret that I was met outside the door of the building not by the Minister's secretary but by the Chief Whip himself, who ushered me in to see the Minister in a back room, without my name being registered as a visitor.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Browne: No, I have already given way a lot, and I have been given the vibes to get a move on.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Browne: No, I shall not—not for the moment, anyway.

That series of meetings confirmed my worst thoughts.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Why will the hon. Gentleman not give way?

Mr. Browne: It was apparent to me——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Why will the hon. Gentleman not give way? He has made a series of allegations——

Mr. Browne: It was apparent to me that the Labour party——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The wider general public, and those who read *Hansard*, will know that, over the past hour and a half, the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) has made a series of outrageous allegations about me. Do you not think it right in the circumstances, Mr. Deputy Speaker—is it not the custom of the House—that, when such allegations have been made, the Member on his feet who is making them should give way at least once, so that a single question can be asked?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): That is a matter for the hon. Member who is speaking.

Mr. Browne: The hon. Member for Workington was not present when I said those things——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I have been in the Chamber ever since we started.

Mr. Browne: I shall refer to the hon. Gentleman again, and I shall gladly give way at that time, but I shall not give way to him at the moment.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on this issue?

Mr. Browne: No. I am talking about the Government Whips Office. I have had the vibes to get a move on, and so far I have given way to every demand that I do so. I must get on.

The series of meetings to which I referred confirmed my worst thoughts. It was apparent to me that the Labour party was out for the blood of a Conservative Member on the issue of Members' interests. That was mentioned in Mr. Merrick Denton-Thompson's letter, referred to on page 147 of the Committee report, which I have already read out, and which said that people were after my blood.

It is interesting that that letter was discarded out of hand by the Committee on the word of another journalist. As the hon. Member for Bolsover has said, the question is: why my blood? I shall attempt to answer that key question by referring to some outside factors that were allowed to influence the course of justice.

In 1988-89, the flavour of the season in the media was the subject of Members' interests. That was magnified by consistent pressure brought by some socialist Members. Allegations were made by socialist Members and by the media against a number of Conservative Ministers, former Ministers and senior Back Benchers. It was an unpleasant and threatening pressure on the Conservative party.

In 1989, the Labour party—especially Members seated below the Gangway—began to interrupt Prime Minister's Questions with persistent choruses of, "Sleaze party," and, "Party of sleaze." Again, that gave cause for considerable concern, which was apparent in the way in which it was received by the then Prime Minister.

At that time, I was involved with the Protection of Privacy Bill, and in an acrimonious divorce, about which there have been many misconceptions. Despite such provocation, I have never spoken ill of my former wife, nor sought to put publicly my side of that great human tragedy. However, I shall now list some undisputed facts.

In 1983 my former wife—now Mrs. Elizabeth Jowitt—left me for my one-time lawyer, Mr. Ernest Jowitt, with whom she had previously committed adultery, and whom she has since married. She sued me for divorce and it was agreed that the divorce should take place on the grounds of my adultery. There may have been reasons, even understandable reasons, with a wife committing adultery, but there can be no excuse for it—and, indeed, I felt much shame.

In the subsequent High Court action concerning financial settlement, Mr. Justice Wood reached some important judgments, most notably those of 6 February 1986 and 25 November 1986. These judgments were subsequently confirmed before the Court of Appeal on 23 November 1988. All of them were public and, indeed, all but the main initial hearings were in public. Despite that, certain sections of the media chose to present a totally different picture of the truth.

According to the Court of Appeal, page 9, columns G and H and page 10, column A:

"there has been a great deal of publicity in the past over this case. There has, it appears, been misleading impressions of the types of applications and the purpose of the applications made by this husband, the suggestion, I believe, that he was a man hoping to live off a rich wife. The facts are very different."

In the media, the breakdown of the marriage was blamed upon my adultery. However, in his judgment of 6 February 1986, Mr. Justice Wood points to the fact that my ex-wife had two prior adulterous relationships—page five, paragraph H, and page six, paragraphs A and F. The media have never made mention of this to my knowledge.

Mr. Justice Wood also said that he was quite satisfied that the tactics of my ex-wife were to pressurise and to try to break me financially—page seven, paragraph F. In describing my ex-wife's character, Mr. Justice Wood said on page 11, paragraph F:

"I judge Mrs. Browne to be highly intelligent and to be manipulative. Where her own interests are concerned she is unscrupulous even to the extent of total lack of frankness."

He went on, on page 13 paragraph D in referring to my ex-wife, to say:

"Unless her evidence is corroborated from independent and reliable sources, it remains suspect and indeed unacceptable."

Finally, on page 8, paragraphs D and F, Mr. Justice Wood refers to my wife's theft of documents from me. It is most interesting to note that no mention was made of the public hearing in which I have pleaded consistently through my counsel not to have my wife sent to prison. Also ignored was the very significant statement made by Mr. Justice Wood in open court which was well attended by journalists on 25 November 1986, when he said:

[Mr. Browne]

"It is right that I should make it perfectly clear that Mr. Browne, throughout these proceedings, from beginning to end, has behaved entirely properly, and indeed, I know in correspondence from Mr. Jowitt he earned the comment that he has behaved as a gentleman. With that comment I would agree."

This statement was published by only one small newspaper.

Despite those published findings of a High Court judge who had heard the case presented to him by barristers over some two weeks, a totally distorted picture was accepted and disseminated to the public. It was a sensational story, I agree, but it was largely false and it was repeated, repeated and repeated. No one appeared willing to correct it.

The evidence: in essence, the story blamed the breakdown of the marriage upon my adultery. This was false, as I have said. Secondly, I was accused of trying to put my wife in gaol. That was false. It was a very newsworthy story, I admit, with a parade before the court on a day when there was not even a court hearing. Some of my lawyers felt that she should go to prison, but I did not. I have never thought so, and in fact I fought successfully in public court to prevent it. That is very different from the story that has been put about.

Thirdly, I was accused of applying for maintenance. Again, that was false. I applied for a division of assets of a marriage which was long and to which I had contributed very heavily and rightly so.

Fourthly, the size of the settlement was considered wrong. I cannot comment on a judge's decision, but, as he said, he noted the deliberate run-up of legal expenses amounting to hundreds of thousands of pounds. He saw an attempt at financial destruction of a spouse. He also saw assets of the marriage stashed away in an overseas trust and the sole beneficiary of that trust of almost £1 million claiming rights to legal aid. This false mass publicity had understandably a most detrimental effect on my standing in my constituency and upon my standing among colleagues in this House. It provided food for my political enemies.

In 1988, I introduced the Protection of Privacy Bill. I understand that, at the outset, it had the tacit support of the majority of the Cabinet. Subsequently, the Government moved to kill it under the guidance of the then Minister, the right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex, who, ironically, was later to operate the payroll and informal Whips against me on 7 March 1990.

Apparently, the Government did so largely due to the enormous pressure brought against the Bill by the media. I personally was subjected to very serious and consistent media criticism and character assassination. Allegations were made that I had introduced a Bill to smother charges of my incorrect registration of a Member's interest. Prima facie, this was false. A reading of the Bill will show quite clearly that business, political and all non-family private matters were specifically excluded from protection under the Bill.

I mention this background only because of the quite unprecedented insults and critical coverage given to me by certain sections of the mass media. I submit that it must have been a material fact in the minds of both members of the Select Committee and of the House in reaching their judgment. However, no attempt whatsoever was made by those Members guiding the judgment, such as the Leader of the House or the Chairman of the Select Committee, to encourage Members to dispel such critical and false assertions from their minds.

Of particular note among others in this respect is the speech of the socialist Member, the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) in *Hansard* at column 961, in which he pointed out that the House would not be discussing my case if it had not been for the press references to my matrimonial problems and the fact that I had introduced the privacy Bill. I believe that he was quite right.

In addition, the press coverage of the Select Committee inquiry, its report and the judgment by the House, were also quite unprecedented. The right hon. Member for Shropshire, North, (Mr. Biffen), a former Leader of the House, was moved to say in the debate, as reported in *Hansard:*

"One of the least happy aspects of the whole case has been the trial by tabloids . . . It has been done in a way that has made the Shropshire luminary Judge Jeffreys seem like a lilac social worker."—[*Official Report*, 7 March 1990; Vol. 168, c. 945.]

Even before the House sat in judgment upon me, it had viewed major detrimental headlines which I believe affected judgment.

I now turn to the House debate itself on 7 March 1990, the day upon which this political show trial was staged for the world to see. As I said, it was first preceded by a secret inquiry where the prosecution case was made and established.

Most people considered the Select Committee inquiry to be the court and saw the House merely as a court of appeal. This was a grave error, because, as I have said, there was no appeal at any stage. No, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the House was used by the Government Whips as a public stamp of approval—the show itself.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you and many other people will, when they realise what happened, be aghast. As I said at the beginning of this necessarily long speech, it is often important to remember that Parliament consists of two Houses, not one. They both have a crucial role to play, and no way more so than in judging any Member of Parliament—be they a peer of the realm or from the Commons House of Parliament.

Searching through "Erskine May" on the subject of trying Members, chapter 25 of the 12th edition and chapter 2 of the 14th edition, you will see that the court of Parliament involves both Houses, not just one. This is most important, because it allows a sense of justice to permeate the more immediate pressures of political expediency. It sounds more like justice.

When Parliament tries one of its Members, it is the Commons House which is seen as the natural inquisitor and prosecutor, and it is this House which conducts the inquiry and prosecutes the case, but it does so in front of the Lords, who act as a jury under the watchful and skilled eye of the man entrusted to run the whole judiciary of our land—the Lord Chancellor of England, who acts as the judge.

The Lords are far less susceptible to Government Whips. So why were the late Lord Boothby and I tried against ancient precedent by only the Commons House or the prosecuting body standing alone? Does that sound like justice, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

The high court is of Parliament, not the high court of the Commons House, and it is before Parliament that right hon. and hon. Members should be judged.

Furthermore, on such matters as contravention of House rules and privileges, surely Mr. Enoch Powell is right when he says that disputes should be tried by the Select Committee on Privileges which, unlike any other Committee, is equipped to take evidence on oath and adjudicate as a tribunal.

Why were the late Lord Boothby and I placed in the hands of a Select Committee which was not only ill-equipped to try hon. Members but itself had a vested interest—the sanctity and upholding of its own rules? Is that justice, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Why were even the ancient mechanisms for justice within this Parliament so ruthlessly and cleverly short-circuited? Was it because the short circuit was the insider circuit of the Government Whips and, like all insider circuits, more easily fixed? Does that ring alarm bells, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Even before the show trial started, it was wrongly based, not in the normal law of the land but by the customs of this high and sovereign court of Parliament, against which, and contrary to all major human rights conventions, there is no appeal. I believe that it is precisely because of the awesome power of Parliament and the lack of appeal that these somewhat cumbersome mechanisms were evolved over centuries. They were cumbersome, but they ensured greater justice. They acted against the manipulation of justice by Government.

I now turn to the debate itself. In this show trial, I was paraded before the television cameras from this very seat to the world for some five and a half hours. The judge in the debate was the Leader of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East. As I have said, he is a Queen's counsel, so he is well versed in the requirements of natural justice. He is no amateur at persuading a jury or a court. He was also to act as chief prosecutor. However, he protested that he was not the prosecutor, merely the judge. In *Hansard*, column 966, he said:

"I put the question before the House, not in any sense as a prosecutor—"

At this stage there was a large interruption, which you can see on the video. This interruption was most important, because it indicated the House's feelings that he was indeed acting as chief prosecutor, and it can be clearly seen on the video. The Leader went on:

"I should like to have the attention of the House while I try to focus on exactly what that question is. *[Official Report*, 7 March 1990; Vol. 168, c. 966.]

The jury were the Members of the Commons House of Parliament. The jury foremen, were the members of the usual channels, most importantly, the Leader of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East and the Chief Whip, the right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex. The jury were whipped, and voted strictly along party lines, with the only rebellion being among some 50 per cent. of Conservative Members who, disobeying their Whips, voted against my punishment. As an ex-Deputy Chief Whip yourself, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will know the power of those Whips.

As judge, the Leader of the House briefed the jury of right hon. and hon. Members extremely carefully and cleverly. In his speech, great importance was attached to the fact that I had apologised. The Leader of the House referred to that apology repeatedly—this is in *Hansard* in columns 891, 896, 898, 899, 906, 926, 963 and 964—together with the Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Wealden, and the hon. Member for Workington. Indeed, the hon. Member for Workington even insisted in column 906 that, because I had conceded some errors, the Select Committee was correct in not allowing me to call any witnesses. In their speeches, they all alleged or insinuated that, as I had apologised, I had obviously agreed with the findings of the Select Committee and the procedures—

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I ask the hon. Gentleman for a yes or no answer to a simple question? Has he, since he was elected to the House in 1979, ever recorded with a taping device a conversation with any Member of the House of Commons without their knowledge and approval? Will he give me a straight answer to that question?

Mr. Browne: Yes, I have, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I realised at the very outset, as I said, of this fixing operation that it was very important that I did so, just to make sure that the record was clear.

The insinuation was that, as I had apologised, I had obviously agreed with the findings of the Select Committee and the procedures upon which those findings were based. This was totally untrue and unsupported. Even in my statement, which I emphasise was not a speech in the debate on 7 March 1990, at the risk of being controversial in such a statement, I said that I was not happy with the investigation procedures. I utterly abhorred the methods used by the Select Committee. However, I had to accept their existence and the referee's whistle.

In the debate on 7 March 1990, I was not granted the right to defend myself. I was permitted only to make a personal statement which, according to the rules of the House, could not be controversial. I was specifically prevented from speaking, making interventions and from asking questions in the debate. Nor was I permitted to challenge any of the wrong or misleading statements of others. I was effectively prevented from making any defence whatsoever.

If the House had not been adversely steered by the Leader of the House and whipped by the Government Chief Whip, there is strong reason to believe that the Government motion for my punishment might have been defeated. The eminent past Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), said:

"My conclusion is that the House should accept that apology. In my experience, the House has always been magnanimous to Ministers or hon. Members who recognise their errors and come to the House to apologise. In this instance I believe that that is the right step".—[*Official Report*, 7 March 1990; Vol. 168, c. 926.]

The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, as a point of interest, voted against my punishment in the subsequent vote, as did the right hon. Members for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) and for Huntingdon (Mr. Major). As judge, the Leader of the House—I am sorry, I have got it wrong; he voted against my punishment. The right hon. Members for Finchley and Huntingdon abstained, but they were here in person.

As judge, the Leader of the House never even attempted to show the House either why or how my errors were serious. On the other hand, he steered the jury of Members present strongly away from any detailed review of the Committee's findings. In *Hansard*, columns 894 and 895, he said:

[Mr. Browne]

"the House will wish to proceed on the basis of the conclusions recorded by the Select Committee. I do not consider it any part of our function today to review those findings in detail."

I find that statement amazing. He also steered the House away from any feelings of allegiance or sympathy with the accused—column 895. He tried to convince the Committee that there should be no real concern over natural justice, due to my apology—columns 963 and 964. Finally, while he obviously knew that the vote would be whipped, he sought to convey to his fellow right hon. and hon. Members in the jury that the decision would be made by the House—column 966. He said:

"For my part, I stand by the terms of the motion, but I am content to leave the matter to the House."

Does that sound, Mr. Deputy Speaker, like an honest judge?

In short, the Leader of the House acted as both judge and prosecutor in a clever but totally biased and hostile manner. Of course, he was a member of the jury. Worse still, he held that coveted legal title and privilege of assumed integrity of Queen's counsel. From him, there was no sympathy for the accused, even though he knew that the jury had been fixed—no sympathy, in fact the reverse, for the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East, in column 895, urges the House away from any temptation of sympathy. I quote what he said:

"We must not, for example, be swayed by some feeling that we are all, as it were, members of the same club and owe some kind of primary allegiance to each other"—[*Official Report* 7 March 1990; Vol. 168, c. 894-967.]

"Of course we must seek to act justly—"

justly, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

"when dealing with our colleages in such matters".

Again, I find that an amazing statement in view of the fact that he knew that this vote would be fixed.

He went on:

"but as we form our judgment in this case I suggest that we should also be mindful of the advice offered to the House, again in 1977, by Lord Strauss—better known to us in the House as George Strauss, former right hon. Member for Vauxhall and Chairman of the Select Committee which reported on the earlier case. He said:

'This is a national affair and the national aspect of it is that there must remain in the mind of the whole public a high esteem for this body, because it is the emblem of democracy in this country'."

What emblem of democracy is deliberate injustice?

The Leader went on:

"We can all say, 'Hear, hear,' to that. The strength and authority of the House of Commons rests upon the respect of the people. If that respect is endangered, much greater damage may follow. That is the fundamental background against which we must remind ourselves why we are so deeply concerned by the topic of today's debate."

What hypocrisy! Here is a right hon. and learned Member, a Queen's counsel, who knows that the charges were very sketchy, who knows that the motion put down was purely political and that if I had accepted his threat to stand down, he would have changed it for a motion completely different, one involving no punishment. Who knows he knew that the House or jury was fixed? What sort of judge, what sort of colleague, was that?

It is somewhat hard for me to reconcile the leading association of any right hon. and learned Gentleman with the totally unjust and most unconstitutional pressures to force me to stand down at the next general election in return for a take note motion and no punishment with the words of the Leader of the House. The Leader of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East, as Lord President of the Privy Council and a Queen's counsel—in my view, it is amazing that, as an honourable man, he felt able to say, knowing what he did:

"The House has increasingly, and in my judgment rightly, taken the view that the composition of the House, in personal as well as political terms, is not a matter for the House itself, but for the electorate. A Member's election to, and continued membership of, this House is a matter between him and his constituents."

That was said by the Leader of the House who had just asked me to stand down in return for no punishmenmt, who had bargained my place in this House, who had bargained the rights of my constituents either to elect or not elect me at the next election.

The Leader went on for more, this time for blood, my blood. He said in regard to punishment:

"Finally I come to consider what is probably the most difficult question—that of penalty or reproach. Should the House proceed to impose a penalty upon my hon. Friend or require him in some way to be reprimanded or rebuked? If so, in what form or at what level should that be set? Some hon. Members, I know, believe—and will, I dare say, argue today—that talk of penalty is, in such circumstances, inappropriate. I do not share that view; nor do I believe that it accords with precedent."—[*Official Report*, 7 March 1990; Vol. 168, c. 895-97.]

What does he mean by precedent? The late Lord Boothby was saved in his trial debate by the Prime Minister, Mr. Winston Churchill, and the Government Whips then immediately changed tack and supported him. That was the precedent which my researches have shown. There is no other precedent—the case of Mr. John Cordle is not appropriate in this respect, because he resigned. There was no vote to be fixed.

To what precedent did my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East refer? Was it really the precedent of justice, or the precedent of quite deliberate injustice to another hon. Member of the House? You have seen much in your time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I will warrant that you have seen nothing like this. I hope that nothing like this ever happens again.

In my show trial, the Leader produced no motion for clemency according to his threat. Unlike the broad spectrum of motions that the Government made available for the last abortion debate, the Government sponsored only one motion in my show trial, and that was guilty as charged, with a call for draconian punishment, a punishment so severe that even a member of the Select Committee itself, the hon. Member for Streatham, was moved to say in the debate:

"I believe the retribution is far greater than the offence."

The hon. Member for Bolsover intervened earlier in the debate to say that he considered that even that retribution was mild and virtually nothing. However, the hon. Member for Streatham said that it was greater than the offence.

The importance of this single Government motion should not be underestimated, because it was obvious that very few Members had read the vast Select Committee report. In all innocence, they relied upon the Leader of the House, who was also a Queen's counsel, to lead them towards a just decision. They believed that the Select Committee report was the hearing and that the Government judged in all honesty that I should be punished. This, together with the Whips, was the decisive influence on the voting of most Members. This motion was the party political deal, which was reflected in it.

On this crucial issue, a past Prime Minister, and ex-Chief Whip, voted against my punishment. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup made some most interesting points. He said:

"In my experience, the House has always been magnanimous to Ministers or hon. Members who recognise their errors and come to the House to apologise. In this instance I believe that that is the right step to take.

I am not trying to rebuke my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House, but I think that he has tried to produce a solution which would meet disparate views in the House."

This again, I emphasise, was the party political motion. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup went on:

"This is a personal matter for each one of us to decide and I think that it has been settled because the apology has been made; the whole House knows it and my hon. Friend's constituents know it."—[*Official Report*, 7 March 1990; Vol. 168, c. 897-926.]

Without any inside knowledge whatsoever, this ex-Prime Minister and ex-Chief Whip had hit upon one of the key elements of this clandestine injustice. He earned my total respect.

As I have said, as the accused in the debate I was permitted to make only a short statement, which according to custom Mr. Speaker announced would be heard in silence and without interruption. That is in *Hansard* at column 889. The custom of the House is that such statements should be apologetic and not controversial, and I was carefully briefed as to that. I was specifically forbidden to speak, to ask questions or even to intervene in the debate. I was therefore denied any opportunity whatsoever either to defend myself or to challenge the report or the speeches or interventions of any Member of the House who spoke in the debate.

You can now see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that from start to finish—throughout the Committee hearings, when I was not allowed to make any verbal presentations of my case but merely to answer questions—I was given no opportunity of a defence case either to the Select Committee or to the House—or, incidentally, to the media. It appeared that the whole case was cut and dried from the beginning. Surely in such a condition, the right of appeal should be considered fundamental.

It is also of interest that the then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley, whose Ministers organised and whipped the vote, abstained in person. A fine lawyer and Whip, the hon. Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) also abstained. The ex-Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup and the ex-Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North voted against the motion, as did many free, non-payroll vote Ministers who were barristers, such as my hon. and learned Friends the Members for Burton and for Perth and Kinross and my hon. Friends the Members for Corby (Mr. Powell) and for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton). My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck), and the Chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee voted against my punishment, as did a member of the Select Committee on Members' Interests, the hon. Member for Streatham. That was a great credit to their integrity, and I thank them now formally.

I wish to place it on the record that I attach no blame whatever to the vast bulk of hon. Members who voted for my draconian punishment. I believe that they voted in all innocence of the injustice of the Select Committee and of the deliberate perversion of justice by some of the most senior officers of state, including a Queen's counsel.

The judicial vote should have been a free vote of the House, but in effect it was along party lines. At 10pm on 7 March 1990, the House voted, but it did so along strictly party lines. The ultimate injustice was that the decision of the House on a judicial vote was done by means of a whipped vote.

Mr. Fraser: It was a free vote on this side of the House. Hon. Members voted in different ways. There were different motions from different Opposition Members. Any idea of it being a party political issue on this side of the House is utter rubbish.

Mr. Browne: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says, because he would know much more about that than me. Nevertheless, it is clear from the voting record on the first crucial vote, on the motion that I was guilty and to be punished—I am not talking about the subsequent votes—that, with one exception, the members of his party voted one way.

Two facts stand out clearly even from a cursory observation of the voting list. The first is that the House divided along party lines, perhaps not whipped in the Labour party's case. The same political bias that had been so consistently and heavily denied by the Chairman of the Select Committee in column 937 of *Hansard* was made clear for all to see. Secondly, Conservative Members were subjected to a payroll Whip. What is not clear, but nevertheless true, is that they were subjected to an informal Whip.

Again it is interesting to note what the Chairman of the Select Committee said in an intervention in the speech of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton. He said:

"I must ask my hon. and learned Friend to bear in mind that there is no question of our punishing or convicting my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne). We did no such thing and it is for the House to decide."

The hon. Member for Wealden knew that the Whips were armed. He continued:

"My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester had every chance to produce any documents he darned well wanted to."

What about the stolen documents that were not returned? They were not mentioned. He continued:

"My hon. and learned Friend will spoil the debate".

I do not know what he meant by that, but as he is present he may tell us in his speech. He continued:

"I can speak with my hand on my heart when I say that the hon. Members for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), whose reputations he tried to traduce a moment ago, and who were honourable members of that Committee, were totally bipartisan. No sign of political passion crept into the Committee to prejudice the case against my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester."—[*Official Report*, 7 March 1990; Vol. 168, c. 937.]

I should like to have conducted the House through further parts of that debate, but——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Could the hon. Gentleman answer me another question, again: yes or no? He referred previously to divorce proceedings. Has he ever changed, modified or removed from a transcript of any legal proceedings in this country any words? Has he ever used such a transcript in any meeting anywhere in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Browne: Not that I can think of. There was however a document that was produced in my constituency on the advice of a lawyer who said that I should answer questions that had been raised in my constituency executive by not going outside the judgment of the learned High Court judge in my case, Mr. Justice Wood. So I prepared a document and took from his published judgment those items that affected just the answers to the questions that had been raised at my executive.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he quoted selectively? Is he saying that he admits in the House of Commons to quoting selectively from a legal document?

Mr. Browne: No, that is not quite what I am saying at all, and the hon. Gentleman does himself no credit whatever in trying to put those words into my mouth. Various questions were raised by my executive that pertained to my divorce. I merely quoted the judge in order to answer those questions that were raised at my executive meeting. So there was selection, just as there is when any Member quotes from *Hansard*.

We cannot produce the whole of *Hansard* for every quote. It is common practice to quote. It is a matter of getting the quotes correct, which I made every attempt to do. There was one typographical error where a secretary missed out a bracket that was not all that vital. I was also criticised severely for putting round brackets instead of square brackets. My typewriter did not have square brackets, and in those days I was unaware of the huge legal significance of the difference between a round bracket and a square bracket. Otherwise, I have nothing further to say in answer to that question.

Immediately after my sentencing by the House, it was asked to vote for a motion clarifying the vague rule on foreign payments, under which I had been sentenced. The goalposts were immediately moved. The result of the vote of the House was portrayed in the media internationally as if there were something very serious and I had got a hugely serious punishment, almost like a criminal. As the hon. Member for Bolsover said, in this House a 20-day suspension is not considered vastly serious, but in the outside world it is. The problem is that judgments by the House are seen by the outside world very differently from the way in which they may be considered by hon. Members.

On the question of precedents, I should like to say that the inquiry report and my subsequent punishment by the House, with the exception of the case of the late Lord Boothby, were virtually unprecedented. The perversion of justice it involved in fixing the House vote was absolutely unprecedented. Following my punishment, all Opposition barracking over the "party of sleaze" stopped immediately. Cases were brought against other hon. Members, but, although they were found guilty, none of them was brought to the House.

Most interestingly, a case was brought against a member of the Select Committee itself—the hon. Member for Workington—and it showed the hon. Member to have deliberately and repeatedly broken a specific rule regarding the declaration of Members' interests. Surprisingly, his case was not referred to the House. Obviously, the precedent set by my punishment was not to be followed.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the hon. Gentleman aware what the report to which he refers says? I do not receive and have never received moneys from the Confederation of Health Service Employees, the trade union, either for expenses or directly to me. That is accepted by the Committee. Is the hon. Gentleman aware what the report said in its conclusion? It said:

"We recognise that Mr. Campbell-Savours has never sought to conceal his sponsorship by COHSE, and that this sponsorship has always been properly registered in the Register of Members' Interests. As we have noted above, it is by no means clear that the House necessarily expects trade union sponsorship, when there is no direct payment whatever to the Member, to be declared."

That is the case in my case. How can the hon. Gentleman link that case, in which no payments were made to me, to his own case, in which he received $88,000 from the authorities in Saudi Arabia?

Mr. Browne: I have the report on the hon. Member's case in my hand. I do not have time to quote it all. However, the last lines of the recommendation of the Select Committee are:

"Since it is a specific rule that sponsorship should be registered, we believe that Mr. Campbell-Savours is technically in breach of the rule on declaration."

The Committee recommended no action. The point is that it was a technicality. Sure. My contention is that so was my case, as I said before. The payment——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: A payment of $88,000.

Mr. Browne: Right from the very beginning, when he was allegedly out for my blood before the Committee even sat, the hon. Gentleman has been quoting vast figures. These monetary amounts are not required by the Select Committee on Members' Interests in the Register. I think that they should be. I think that it should be total—either no declarations or total declarations. However, because we steer this rather grey area in the middle where, as I said at the beginning of my speech, there is this farcical situation of a financial declaration with no monetary allowance needing to be disclosed, we now have this situation.

It was said that the fee was for one little bit of work, and there has been some downgrading and attempts to make it look like a huge fee for almost nothing—which was totally false. The fact is that the hon. Member for Workington keeps mentioning this figure. Why? Because it creates more jealousy? People say, "How does this man get a huge fee for almost nothing?" Even hon. Members have said to me, "My gosh, that seems an awful lot of money, John." Jealousy was aroused among the jury sitting in this House by statements such as the hon. Gentleman has made.

As I said earlier in my speech, the technicality was that I asked the Registrar whether that payment should be registered, and he said no, because it was a payment to my company which had already been declared. It was because of the manipulation—the bending—of this rule that the Select Committee said, "Oh, but as you own 50 per cent. of the stock, you should have declared it." What did the Committee do immediately I had been sentenced? It changed the rule.

It is now clear for Members' interests that, if one owns over a certain percentage of stock in a company, all payments to those companies, declared or not, have to be declared. Now, I understand it is very clear. It was a technicality. I am not trying to insult the hon. Member for Workington: all I am saying is that he was on a technical

charge as well. Why was the precedent of my case not followed? Why was a member of the Select Committee not brought back to the House, as happened in my case?

Some people have asked me why I have waited until now to raise the matter. The truth is that I have been trying to raise the matter for well over a year. My hope in explaining the case, which involved not just a great injustice but, much more importantly, a deliberate injustice, was that some right hon. Member would not only see the outrage, but be prepared to do something about it or even to speak out. I therefore tried to appeal.

I soon discovered that there was no right of appeal anywhere. This was in direct contravention of article 14 of the United Nations convention on civil and political rights of 1966. One of the most fundamental of all human rights, as I have said, is the right of natural justice to appeal. I have tried for over a year to appeal this on the grounds that I was systematically denied almost every basic human right to natural justice and that the procedures of the Select Committee itself stood in the way of justice. I do not blame the members of the Select Committee. These are the procedures. My aim with the Leader of the House today is, by showing what happened in my case, to get the procedures changed.

If an hon. Member is arraigned before a Select Committee, particularly on a matter of such seriousness affecting his whole career—so that he is virtually sitting in a court on an issue affecting his life—evidence should be taken on oath and the Committee should be equipped to take evidence on oath and to adjudicate. Those are the procedures which I am trying to get at. I am not trying to criticise the members of the Select Committee. They do not decide whether or not certain things can be done. They are part of the system. So I believe that great matters need to be corrected.

To give an example, the Select Committee denied me some of the rights that are given to all murderers and even to thieves, such as the right to call witnesses in one's defence and to have them heard and cross-examined. I do not know whether it was the wish of the Chairman of the Select Committee or whether it is the system, but the fact remains that those rights were not granted, even though they are essential to proving one's case. The defendant should be able to call witnesses and have them cross-examined by himself and by the Committee——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have heard the hon. Member refer to those particular points on many occasions. He is now getting very close to tedious repetition.

Mr. Browne: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was trying to drum them home. I will get on.

I have also tried to appeal against the findings of the House on 7 March 1990 on the grounds that the decision was made as a result of a quite deliberate perversion of justice by some of the most senior and powerful officers of the Government. I tried in vain. I realise that there is no established appeal mechanism in the House of Commons, but the Government certainly have the power to bring the matter back before the House.

Surely any Government who are a signatory to the United Nations convention and are made up of men of honour would move decisively to expose wrong and to punish any deliberate abuse of justice in the treatment of an hon. Member. As I said, I believe that the House was deliberately misled when it debated and voted on the issue on 7 March 1990. Therefore, as I have said before, I do not hold the vast majority of hon. Members to blame in any way whatever.

I have said that the right of appeal is very basic. It is enshrined in clause 5 of article 15 of the UN convention. It is also enshrined in the European convention. Governments talk much about human rights, and rightly so. Our Government have signed those two conventions, but I understand that they have not signed the protocols that allow individuals to bring cases against the Government under the United Nations convention. Why not? Be that as it may, I have to accept—and I had to accept—that there was no appeal.

I believe that my case is similar to the Dreyfus case in Paris in the 1890s.

Mr. Skinner: Similar to what?

Mr. Browne: Yes, similar to the Dreyfus case. He was a captain in the French army. He was falsely charged, falsely convicted, disgraced and imprisoned for five years on Devil's Island.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Browne: I am anxious to get on.

His case was then covered up by the state, and a state cover-up is very powerful. As Anatole France said in describing the Dreyfus case:

"Some people began to recognise the injustice done, but it was supported and defended by so many open and secret powers that even the boldest hesitated. Those whose duty it was to speak up kept silent."

As no official avenue of appeal was open to me, I approached some of the most powerful Ministers, from the Prime Minister downwards, with my appeal, listing what the House has now heard. I approached some of the most influential people in the realm. My hope was that honourable people would move to correct this injustice. My hope was that they would certainly move to root out deliberate injustice, for what greater crime can there be than deliberate injustice?

Sadly, the result of my approaches was silence, in all but one case—yes, a constructive suggestion from the right hon. Member for Finchley. In the case of the Government Chief Whip, it even aroused hostility. I was even threatened. Certainly, my constituency has been put into trouble by it and has become almost a laughing stock.

Does that state silence amount to a cover-up—a cover-up so powerful that even parts of the media are silenced? Does deliberate injustice by the Government amount to corruption, and if a little corruption is accepted for the good of the party, where does it stop? Who will be next? Which right hon. or hon. Member of the House would be selected in future? For if Ministers, given charge of secret agencies such as M16 and M15, can take such blatantly discriminatory and unjust action against a loyal colleague, no citizen of this land is safe under the law.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is getting close to impugning the integrity and honour of other hon. Members of the House. He knows that that is not in order. The only way in which he can do that in order is by putting down a motion. Criticism is in order—even strong criticism—but he must not impugn integrity and honour.

Mr. Browne: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I accept that ruling and I have put down early-day motion 385 to that effect.

I fought my case in the knowledge of my innocence and also the knowledge of this great and deliberate injustice and that it could happen to other right hon. or hon. Members who have outside interests. I have fought my case in the hope that the House will urgently examine and change its rules and procedures to prevent the same deliberate injustice from ever happening again.

As Clemenceau said, again in the Dreyfus case:

"The cause of human justice admits no compromise. You must be either for it or against it."

I wonder who will be the first to break the silence—the silence of the lambs.

12.42 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): It may be for the convenience of the House if I intervene at this point.

The speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) covered three main topics affecting the House and those are the only topics on which I may comment.

The first topic is the debate on 7 March 1990, when the House considered the report from the Select Committee on Members' Interests, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith). The findings of the Select Committee in that report were fully covered in that debate, when a variety of different views were expressed before the House came to a clear decision on a vote. I have re-read that debate thoroughly. Certainly, a variety of views were expressed. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester that there was no whipping. It was a free vote and my hon. Friend mentioned the difference in the way that some of my hon. Friends voted.

As the House will know, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester is aware—he and I have corresponded about this—there is no formal route of appeal following the decision that the House reached in March 1990, after the debate conducted in accordance with the rules of the House. The resolution that the House approved at the end of that debate is the final decision of the House.

Mr. John Browne: I find it hard to accept my right hon. Friend's statement. I know that he is an honourable man —I sincerely mean that—but he said that there was a free vote. Perhaps, on the surface, there was a free vote. Everyone in the House knows how the Whips operate, with the payroll and by applying pressures—what is called the informal vote.

Mr. Skinner: Well, we had a free vote.

Mr. Browne: Maybe, but I am talking about the Conservative side of the House. Even a Cabinet Minister came up to me and told me that he was pressurised. He actually said that he was ashamed of what he had done, but that he was ordered to do it by the Whips. He did not attend the debate, but he came in to vote because he was ordered to do so by the Chief Whip. My right hon. Friend must admit that although it was a free vote on the surface, it was very much a whipped vote, under the table, on this side of the House.

Mr. MacGregor: If my hon. Friend looks at the Division lists, he will see that my hon. Friends voted in a variety of different ways. Therefore, I think that the position is clear.

The second topic raised in my hon. Friend's speech was the procedures followed once the Select Committee has made a report following a complaint against a Member. As my hon. Friend is aware, the rules of the House are clear in relation to reports from the Select Committee. They are set out in the annex to the report of the Select Committee on Members' Interests (Declaration) of the 1974-75 Session, and summarised in "Erskine May" at page 389. It is made absolutely clear there that the final decision is for the House to take. The proceedings in respect of Select Committee reports are of long standing and perfectly well understood by the House, and I see no need for them to be re-examined.

The third topic discussed by my hon. Friend for Winchester at great length was the procedures that the House has established for the registering of Members' interests and for the investigation by the Select Committee on Members' Interests of alleged breaches of those rules. The House will recall that on 7 March 1990 the House approved a second motion requesting the Select Committee on Members' Interests to study and report further on the questions raised by its report relating to, first, the definition of outside interests and the enforcement of obligations in relation to declarations of outside interests by hon. Members and, secondly, the procedures whereby complaints may be brought before the Select Committee and whereby the Select Committee investigates such complaints; together with such other questions as might appear to it to arise therefrom.

My hon. Friend spent a considerable part of his speech today examining the procedures in front of the Select Committee and also making various recommendations on the definition of "outside interests" and the "enforcement of obligations". I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden will have noted the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester. At present, those matters are in the hands of the Select Committee, as the House requested. I do not think that it would be right for me to discuss them in detail today before the Select Committee has produced the report as requested by the House.

The matter was fully debated in March 1990 and the points that my hon. Friend raises about future issues affecting the Select Committee are ones which the Committee is currently investigating. I believe that it is right to leave it there.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Leader of the House ask those following our debate to note how the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) has interpreted what happened during the Divisions that evening? Is not it significant that the hon. Gentleman stated that, 10 minutes later, the House took a decision in effect to change the rules, but that was not the decision taken? The House recommended that the Select Committee should consider the rules. There is a great distinction between the way in which the hon. Gentleman presented what happened and the way in which the House made its recommendation. Will the Leader of the House allude to that fact? The speech of the hon. Gentleman, which lasted about three

hours, was littered with examples of slight distortions of the facts that he believes would benefit the presentation of his case.

Mr. John Browne *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: I must reply to the hon. Gentleman's point. My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester has taken a great deal of the time of the House.

It is not right for me to comment on detailed points made today. My position as Leader of the House is to deal with key issues in the motion relating to the way that the Select Committee deals with Members' interests and the procedures thereafter. I have responded to both those matters.

The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) is right about the recommendation—I have re-read all the papers and note that the Select Committee recommended a change but that, on 7 March 1990, the House did not approve that recommendation. Instead, it asked the Select Committee to look at the wider issues to which I referred. I understand that the Select Committee is now doing that. When the Select Committee makes its report to the House, that will be the time for the House to consider the matters to decide whether changes are required.

12.48 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): What we have heard today is a catalogue of events from a Member of the Tory party who, in the run-up to the 1987 general election, did what many Tory Members do—made money on the side. Not content with being a Member of Parliament on a salary that was then about £25,000 or £26,000 a year, he wanted to line his pockets from outside. Many people do that—about 250 Tory Members and a small handful of Opposition Members, although the number of Opposition Members who make money outside this place is thank God, decreasing.

In 1974 people in local government were told that they had to sign a register of their interests when they became councillors. We in Parliament said that that was a great idea because it would ensure that councillors discussing and voting on planning decisions had to tabulate in a register their interests and for whom they were speaking.

In our society there has always been a conflict of interests. Can you truly represent your constituents on a local authority or in Parliament and at the same time represent someone else? That is the classic question. Over the years, many people have said that they can do both jobs. They have even gone so far as to say that your need to do another job to keep up some interest. That is like me saying, "Where is the nearest pit?"—miners who come to Parliament cannot work in a pit for half a day a week, but Members who are lawyers can go off to the law courts and pick up £60,000 a year, quite apart from what they get for being in the House—if and when we see them.

The reason why his place starts at half-past two in the afternoon, except on Fridays, is so that people can make money in the City and in the law courts. They could also make money at Lloyd's, but in recent years it seems that they have not been able to open the box and pull out a lot of money all the time. They are now squealing and they want their money back. They put their bets on in that posh gambling den of Lloyd's and they have nearly always made money, but now that they are not winning they want Parliament and the taxpayer to foot the bill.

In that environment, along came the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne). He told his Tory friends that he had interests outside Parliament which were making him a lot of money on the side. When he became a Member of Parliament, I suppose that they told him that he had better declare those interests in the register which Skinner and his friends forced through the House of Commons in the early 1970s. We said that if it was right for people in local government to have a register, there should be one in Parliament, too.

That register was no big deal. We were not asking people to put in how much they made, although they ought to do that. A section of the register should record such facts. For example, the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) worked for two months for Maxwell Communication Corporation. He got a £300,000 pay-off when he packed in, £100,000 extra as redundancy pay for working two months, and a Mercedes for a quid. That should all have been in the register.

Along comes the smart Alick hon. Member for Winchester. Given that none of his mates on the Tory side had disclosed their interests, he decided not to do so either. He picked up £88,000 from Saudi Arabia. I have always said that that money should have ended up in the miners' fund. During the strike, the hon. Gentleman accused the miners of getting money from the middle east, while all the time he was picking it up himself.

That 88,000 quid was not disclosed, but in the run-up to the 1987 election some bright-eyed spark at *The Observer* called David Leigh found out about it. It was a nice juicy little piece. OK—the story could have related to any of the 250 Tory Members, and for the hon. Member for Winchester it was sad that it was him, especially as he had a bit of trouble, to which I shall not refer, with another matter.

The net result was that the voters of Winchester decided that they had someone representing them who was making a lot of money on the side, and the Tory vote slumped. It is pretty obvious that someone in Winchester Tory party would have said, "We had better do something about this." So along comes the Select Committee. Here I am paraphrasing because I am not a member of it—I do not have owt to do with Select Committees.

Mr. John Browne: The hon. Gentleman has paraphrased a lot. It was not that the voters of Winchester thought that here was a chap who was making money on the side—the article by Mr. Leigh suggested that I had done something wrong. My point was that, according to the registrar, whom I asked in 1983, I had done exactly correctly. That was the point, and that is why I issued the suit.

Mr. Skinner: So, along comes the hon. Member for Winchester and he says, "I don't like this article in *The Observer*, so I'll issue a writ—I'm going to stop it and I'm going to make a lot of money." After all the business of the Select Committee and the writ being issued, the case was never pursued. Like many other writs, it was issued to silence somebody. He has talked about being silenced, but he decided to silence *The Observer* for a convenient period, and he has never pursued the matter. If David Leigh had said something extravagant and outrageous why is it that,

[Mr. Skinner]

with all his money, the hon. Gentleman was not capable of pursuing the writ to make sure that he landed *The Observer* with a big, fat bill? The truth is that he did not follow it through. He blames the Select Committee for having looked into the matter, as he said earlier in his long tirade.

Mr. Browne: That is not the point. How could a suit like that possibly be pursued successfully when the Select Committee came along and said that I was not right in the way that I gave information to the Register of Members' Interests?

Mr. Skinner: When I was at school, that was known in geometry as QED. The hon. Gentleman has proved my case. He is saying that his friends in the Tory party said to him, "I'm afraid we'll have to rap you over the knuckles, John." As a result, the paper realised that it had a first-class chance of sustaining its argument. The hon. Gentleman does not realise that he has made a statement which proves that *The Observer* had a case because a gang of his friends in the Tory party proceeded to do what *The Observer* thought they ought to do. *The Observer* is not supposed to be a Tory paper, although I am not sure about that.

The hon. Gentleman has been whingeing this morning. He got 20 days. Somebody said to me, "What shall we do, Dennis, with this bloke who's up for trial?" Trial—I ask you! The hon. Gentleman has compared himself to Dreyfus. He has a lot of brass. According to the register, he is still making a big, fat packet on the side, as well as picking up his salary of 30,000 quid. A lot of Tories do that, but to come here and say that he has been treated like Dreyfus is worse. He may be a lot of things, but Dreyfus he is not. He got 20 days. Big deal!

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) touched the Mace.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): He more than touched it.

Mr. Skinner: He dropped it. He tried to pick it up, but he dropped it and his case turned into a cause célèbre. My hon. Friend got kicked out of Parliament for a longer time than the hon. Member for Winchester, and he has suffered in other respects. Others have been thrown out for other reasons. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) got thrown out because he said that the last Prime Minister was lying. Other people get kicked out and their penalty can add up to well over 20 days, and they have not lined their pockets. They have been kicked out of Parliament because they have said things that they believed in, as a matter of principle.

The truth is that the hon. Member for Winchester has suffered at the hands of his friends. Let us put it on the record once again. The Select Committee has a Tory majority—his friends. One hon. Member who serves on the Committee has been referred to several times—my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). The hon. Member for Winchester is trying to make us believe that my hon. Friend has twisted all the other members of the Committee—a majority of whom are Tories—round his little finger like some Machiavelli so as to do down the hon. Member for Winchester. I will believe a lot of things, but I ain't believing that.

The hon. Member for Winchester should understand what really happened. His party decided in 1987, when it saw the Tory vote in Winchester slump, that it had better get rid of him and that he would be the casualty. He may be standing against the Tory candidate at the next election.

Mr. Haynes: He is.

Mr. Skinner: Quite frankly, he should get on with it. If I see Tories falling out, I will do everything that I possibly can to help, although I will not go down and speak for the hon. Gentleman. If they are to fall out and fight one another, that is their business. We all know that the Tories have divided the working class over the years. Divide and rule is their tactic.

The hon. Member for Winchester told us this morning that he is dividing against his right hon. and hon. Friends, and that is why he has found himself in a predicament. The hon. Gentleman talked about the attendance in the Chamber when a certain private Bill was considered. He got his facts wrong. When a private Bill is considered in this place, Members have to attend. He tried to make a comparison between a private Bill involving King's Cross and another private Bill dealing with the Register of Members' Interests. Of course fewer Members turned up here for the Bill on Members' interests. We all know that it was not a private Committee.

As I see it, the hon. Gentleman has produced his manifesto for Winchester when the general election takes place. I will give him some advice. I shall not give him a great deal today, but I will tell him this: that manifesto is too long for the general election. You need a few pictures and a shorter manifesto. If you make the speech that you used this morning when you are at the guildhall at Winchester, you had better complete it much more quickly than you did today. In other words, you should get to the point. You would also be better off not reading it all out.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order.

Mr. Skinner: I am just giving the hon. Gentleman some advice. You were not here this morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman went through it all and we heard it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member keeps saying "you" instead of "the hon. Member".

Mr. Skinner: I get your drift, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was giving him serious advice if he is to stand against the Tory party. If that happens, the Labour candidate could slip through the middle and win the seat. That is one of the principal reasons for my involvement in the debate.

The hon. Member for Winchester should understand that this place is a gentlemen's club as well as a place for enacting legislation. I have been here for 20-odd years and I know that. I do not like the gentlemen's club part of it. I decided when I came here not to be part of it, but I knew it existed. The hon. Gentleman has been done by many of his hon. Friends who are in this club. He was not done by Labour Members. We had a free vote. The hon. Gentleman says that there was a whipped Government vote against him, and he must prove that. As I have said, we were not whipped. We did not get involved in the club. Many of my hon. Friends said, "We will not vote to send somebody out for 20 days." They did not want to vote. A hell of a lot of Members did not vote for that reason.

The hon. Member for Winchester must understand that when he came to the House he came as part of the gentlemen's club. If he wants to be involved in the camaraderie of that club, he might have to accept some of the rules. When Mr. Speaker tells me that I must leave the Chamber, I do not like it. On those occasions, I should like to appeal. I should like to say to Mr. Speaker, "Look, there are good reasons for my saying that someone is lining his pockets." But that is not possible, and I have to leave. When I pass through the doors, there is a bobby waiting waiting for me to escort me from the premises. An hon. Member who finds himself in that position is not allowed to speak in front of a camera in the Norman Shaw building. Yet the hon. Member for Winchester is whingeing because there was no appeal. In fact, he secured one, whereas I have never had one—I have never had a chance to put my case on the occasions when I have been told to have an early bath.

The hon. Gentleman should understand what the game is all about. That is all that I say to him. He has sat among those who want to make money on the side. I think that I know what is getting to his craw. It is that he has been done when many of his hon. Friends are making money. At the beginning of his speech I sat in my place thinking that he would reveal all their names. I thought that he would give us the figures that are absent from the register. I thought, "He might tell us what ex-Cabinet Ministers —who have 59 directorships between them—are getting". I thought for one fleeting moment that the hon. Gentleman would put numbers by the side of all those directorships, but he did not. Instead, he pulled back.

Here is another bit of advice for the hon. Gentleman: if he means to fight the election, he must not pull back. He will get some good copy. Not only the Winchester press but the national press as well, will be interested. Chris Moncrieff will be ringing the hon. Gentleman every morning. Think about it. Name the names—they are all in the register. The hon. Gentleman could make 20 or 30 speeches in Winchester and they could be in —I was going to say *The Sun*, but I think that *The Sun* would black them. Anyway, he could be in the *Daily Mirror* every morning.

I know that there is something wrong with the register. We all know that. Two or three things need doing—and we should be sharp about it. We want to know how much money is being made by all the company directors and the rest. What would be wrong with that? I would go further, but the House would not carry it. Every Member of Parliament should have only one job. I would like to see that in the Labour manifesto—not many of my hon. Friends have outside interests. It would be a good thing, and we should sweep the country. There would be no talk of hung Parliaments and the like. I would like us to say to the millions of voters that the next Labour Government will insist that when someone enters Parliament he must represent his constituents—he should have one job and one job alone. But the hon. Member for Winchester would not support that.

Mr. Browne: Yes, I do.

Mr. Skinner: If the hon. Gentleman supports the idea of one job, and one job alone for a Member of Parliament, why has he still got so many interests in the register?

The hon. Member for Winchester had a choice in the gentlemen's club, and he did not take it. A lot of hon. Members who go before the Select Committee about such matters give in. I would not do that—I would take it on the chin. If I had stood up and said something in the Chamber or outside, or if I had done something, I should stand by it, but the hon. Member for Winchester wanted to have his cake and eat it as well—he wanted to plead to the Select Committee, but he did not want to take the consequences of what he had done and said. He could have apologised at the beginning, and that probably would have been the end of the matter. But he chose to bluff it through, and the bluff did not work.

The hon. Gentleman should be a man. He should understand what happens when someone enters to the House as a Member, with all this apparatus. It may be true that he is one of many Tory Members of Parliament who are making a lot of money. He feels, "Why should I get done?" He is like the bloke who speeds up the motorway at 100 mph—the Minister of State for Defence Procurement did so twice in a fortnight, and said that he thought that the police were escorting him. One cannot say in court, "Seven other people broke the speed limit as well, Mr. Judge, or Mr. Magistrate, so why have you picked on me?" Such things happen. Some people get picked on occasionally, and they think, "Why me?" The hon. Member for Winchester should understand that he has had his chance, but he wanted everything and it did not work.

I think that the rules are wrong. They want tightening up. We want to ensure that the register is complete, and there is only one method of doing that. It is for all of us to represent our constituents, and there is an end of it. If hon. Members want to help someone they can do so and get nothing out of it. When I get up in the morning and the House does not start sitting until 2.30, I look in the papers to see if there is a strike, and I join in if it is within 20 miles of this building. That is my interest. I do not want to be paid for it. I may have to pay, to help the people who are on strike. But to think that one can make money and get away with it is another matter.

The hon. Member for Winchester has achieved one thing in raising the issue today. He has again raised the question whether the register is satisfactory. The answer is clear: it is not satisfactory. It is time to change it, and I hope that that happens in the next Parliament, after Labour sweeps to power. If the Labour Government cannot introduce the idea that one Member of Parliament should have only one job, who can? My hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) is very sound on such matters and I ask him to convey to the next Labour Government the fact that the least we can expect is for the register to be brought up to date. Not only that—we should ensure that we know fully how much money people are making on the side in the law courts, in the City and in the board rooms. If this debate has done that, it has served a useful purpose.

1.9 pm

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) was courteous enough to give me notice that he intended to refer to me today as I am Chairman of the Select Committee on Members' Interests. Like my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, I do not intend to reply in detail to the criticisms of that Committee.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester will be aware, the Select Committee was faced in 1989 with a

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disagreeable and complicated task when it was required to investigate complaints made against him. Our inquiry took nine months, which was a long time. The Committee's report, and even more important, the 150 pages of oral and written evidence which were printed with it, must be seen and read as a whole. They are the basis on which the House took its decision in March 1990.

To take any particular political part or passage in isolation can only distort the overall picture. If anyone in the House or outside, having read the report and the evidence in full, were to accept the interpretation of my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester of the events in preference to the Committee's findings, I would disagree with him profoundly. I must point out that the findings were unanimous and I stand by the integrity of my colleagues on the Committee in the discharge of their duties.

As I said, I do not want to go into the details. However, there is one very important point which is a matter of justice. My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester said many times today that he was specifically denied the authority to call witnesses. That is certainly not my recollection.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Hear, hear.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: It is obviously also not the recollection of the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester did not make any request to call witnesses either before or during his evidence. However, very much later, during our inquiry——

Mr. John Browne: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: I will finish my sentence first.

Much later, during our inquiry, my hon. Friend asked to call a former business partner. That was the only occasion. Otherwise, in the course of his evidence, that was not the case. I am afraid that I must point that out to him. Although I do not want to go into detail, that is an important point that he has made today.

Mr. Browne: I respect what my hon. Friend has said, but I asked on a number of occasions to call witnesses. I asked the registrar, I think, on at least three occasions whether I could bring three specific people to address the Committee to have them cross-examined—particularly Mr. Chattington, Mr. Merrick Denton-Thompson and the former registrar. I was told, "Certainly not." I was told that the only people who could call witnesses to the Committee were the members of the Committee themselves, and this was verified in the debate. The hon. Member for Streatham (Sir W. Shelton) said exactly that —that I was not allowed to call witnesses for cross-examination.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: I am very sorry, but I must tell my hon. Friend that he was given the chance to call witnesses. I will not go into the details about Mr. Chattington because if we go into that, we will get very involved and we will become involved in a situation in which we found ourselves so often in respect of our hearing evidence from him.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): My hon. Friend referred to the report of his Select Committee which, of course, I read with the greatest attention before our debate two years ago. I have no doubt that he conducted the proceedings of that Committee with the great probity with which we all associate him in the House. Does he agree that that report did not reach any conclusions about the guilt or innocence of my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne)? It rejected a number of allegations against him and focused on two, on which it recommended further investigation. Those were the conclusions of the Select Committee report.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: No, that is not quite the story. In our view, not all the allegations were founded. In the course of our report, we indicated that that was the case, but in two particular instances we believed that there was a breach.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the hon. Gentleman further qualify his reply to the invervention of the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies)? Is not it true to say that we did not recommend further investigation? We recommended that the House should make a decision on the decisions that we took. The words in our report are:

"We therefore uphold the complaint."

That was a decision that we took on the basis of all the evidence before the Committee. It was then for the House to decide whether, in the light of our upholding the complaint, action should be taken.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: The hon. Gentleman is correct.

There is another aspect into which I do not intend to go in detail. It concerns the procedures which the Committee followed when investigating the case. They were the procedures which had been approved by the House in 1975 when it first instituted the Register of Members' Interests. Essentially, they are the same procedures that any Select Committee uses to establish the facts of a matter and then to come to a conclusion on the basis of those facts. At the end of the debate on my hon. Friend's case, the House gave the Committee a wide-ranging remit to review the rules of registration and declaration and the procedure for investigating complaints.

The Committee has had a lot of other business to tackle in the intervening period, but it has not neglected the remit which the House gave it. I hope that the Committee will be in a position to agree a report on those matters before Parliament is dissolved. In the meantime of course, it would be quite improper for me to anticipate the report.

When the House eventually comes to debate that report, it will be able to take into account the points made in today's debate and in the debate in March 1990. However, it would be wrong to regard that review as in any way reopening the case on which the House reached a decision nearly two years ago. If the House had considered that the alleged deficiencies in our present rules and procedures were sufficiently serious to tilt the balance of judgment in my hon. Friend's case, it could have done so. It did not do so and, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has made clear, its decision cannot now be reopened.

1.16 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): This has not been a very happy or pleasant occasion. We all know briefly the history of the matter. The hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) had a well-publicised matrimonial squabble. he was complained about by a journalist who, in the terms of the Select Committee's report, was not wholly without professional interest in the result of those matters.

The hon. Gentleman was suspended by the House for 20 days, which is not a terribly serious punishment, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has pointed out. His real complaint is that he was disowned by his party. That is a matter between him, his party and his constituency; it is not a matter for rehearsal in the House today. The hon. Gentleman was lucky in the ballot, and he has chosen a matter of personal interest rather than a subject of interest to his constituents.

We have one very clear and one slightly vague obligation in relation to our interests. When we speak in a debate, we should declare our interest where the speech touches on that subject. That is a much wider responsibility than the responsibility for declarations. I used to have a caravan at one time. I do not think that that is a declarable interest, but, if I was speaking about caravan sites—indeed, I have done so—I should declare an interest, because, although it is not something that needs to go in the Register of Members' Interests, it is clearly relevant to what I am saying.

Equally, if I have a dwelling house that is in the path of a motorway or is subject to the channel tunnel connection, although I do not have to declare my dwelling house, nevertheless if I was talking about legislation about which directly affected my interests, it is something that I should declare. That is a clear, wide and relevant declaration which we all understand.

Except on private Bills, it is fanciful to think that hon. Members actually change their vote as a result of any payment that they receive from outside. I can hardly imagine the circumstances, when it comes to voting, in which the hon. Member for Winchester will go through the Labour Lobby because there is some financial interest. Everybody would soon be on to that.

A good deal of scamming goes on here. People have received money from outside interests as consultants in their capacity of Members of Parliament. They are taking outside interests for more of a ride than they are taking the House of Commons. I cannot think of any circumstances in which hon. Members would have been paid a consultancy and would have changed their vote in the House as a result of any such payment.

Parliament does not award contracts. Parliament does not determine expenditure, except in a general sense. The real thing that matters—it is much more akin to declarations of interest for local authorities—is when one is making representations to Ministers.

It is not the House that has the mega-bucks, although we vote them; the people who can really fix the mega-bucks are Ministers and senior civil servants. That is the really important part, and that brings us to the declaration of interests. It is relevant not so much to what is said in the House or how hon. Members vote here, as to representations made to Ministers who may be placing contracts.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will my hon. Friend go further on this? There is a whole range of interests, and he has rightly mentioned some that should be declared because people should know about them. I am particularly interested in whether or not a person is a member of a masonic order and of particular lodge. Does my hon. Friend agree that that should also be a declarable interest? I am not against people being masons—that is entirely up to them—but we should know. Does my hon. Friend agree that that should be added to the register?

Mr. Fraser: I think that I am on the record as saying that that should be declarable, particularly in relation to judges. If one is a member of a masonic lodge, one should not be ashamed of saying so. People can then judge actions in the light of that fact.

I mentioned the declaration of interests first. The second is the Register of Members' Interests. In it, some matters are set out so that people know of an interest. It also saves tedious repetition. I have it in the register that I am a solicitor, so I do not have to say that on every occasion when I rise to speak. It is fairly well known.

I agree with the hon. Member for Winchester slightly, in that the criteria in the register are vague. It uses words that are subjective. One does not know quite what words such as "substantial" mean. It mentions "foreign persons", which is so wide a phrase if one does not consider it in the context of foreign Governments and foreign organisations.

Nevertheless, the real deficiency is that we do not yet have declarations. We have the declarations of the puppets, but not of the people who pull the strings. That is a deficiency. The Select Committee's recommendations for a change of practice in the registration of lobbyists and their clients who seek to influence Ministers are long overdue.

The biggest interests of all, about which most of us know, are represented largely by Tory Members. They are usually the interests of the landlord against the tenant, the brewer against the consumer, the fund manager against the investor, and the employer against the worker. Those are the truly big interests. The judgment will be made about them not here, but at the general election.

In a sense, this has been an unhappy and slightly embarrassing debate. I am afraid that the epitaph of the hon. Member for Winchester will be "public schoolboy, guards officer, banker, Member, whinger".

1.23 pm

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): In a few short moments, I wish to agree with most of those who have spoken. The motion of my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne), in so far as it refers to the inadequacy of the present system of registering Members' interests, makes a perfectly fair point. I would go further than that and agree with many of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—about the first and last time that I shall probably say that.

Many Conservative Members recognise that the Register of Members' Interests—I have it, made up to 13 January 1992, with me—is an extraordinarily inadequate document. As with so many ill drawn up documents, it conceals more than it reveals, and by doing that we do ourselves no favours. I disagree on one point with the hon. Member for Bolsover. It is a little naive to think that every hon. Member should behave in this place as if it were a

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nunnery. I understand the hon. Gentleman's demonic purity of view, for which he is well known, nationally famous, and his hair-shirt philosophy. That is in contrast to the Gucci shirt worn by his hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). It is probably not Gucci, because Gucci is probably vastly out of style.

Mr. Tony Banks: It is Balmain.

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman's attractive tie is infinitely more fashionable than mine. Mine is an old tie which does not seem to crease, and it was issued by the IPU.

When I return home late at night after my hard work in this place at perhaps 10.30 or 11 o'clock——

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): Or at 1.30 in the morning.

Mr. Norris —or indeed at 1.30 in the morning—by way of diversion I often switch on the television and see none other than the hon. Member for Newham, North-West hosting a programme, accompanied by a good friend—not my hon. Friend at this time but perhaps one day he will be a noble Lord—the putative Lord Archer of Grantchester. Between them they do very well. That role is not contained in the register, which suggests that the employment of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West is as parliamentary adviser to the Broadcasting and Entertainment Trades Alliance. I am sure that that is an oversight.

There was an oversight on my part and one that I noticed only today when I saw that the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and I both went to address a conference in the south of France in August. I did not put that on the register, largely because I was doing the job in the vacation and got paid for it. Here and now, I have written a note to the registrar putting that on the record.

Perhaps the hon. Member for Newham, North-West would like to comment. He is a good friend of mine, and I do not suggest the slightest impropriety. I am merely pointing to the unreality of the view expressed by the hon. Member for Bolsover that we should exist in a little cocoon and have no outside interests or earnings to be justified.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade is a substantial grocer, although I understand that he takes no practical part in the family business. None the less, he probably benefits from it to some small degree. My right hon. Friend could do almost any job, but he has chosen to give up much of his free time to work extremely hard as a Member and an excellent Minister. It is utterly unrealistic to suggest that he should do that for the salary that a generous population affords to its Members of Parliament. That is nonsense, and does not wash.

I am perfectly happy with the concept that my good friend the Member for Newham, North-West and the future Lord Archer of Grantchester and others should earn money outside at the same time as doing an excellent job for constituents.

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Gentleman started his speech with a fairly amusing point about my clothes. My shirt is by Balmain and the silk tie by courtesy of the Tie Rack, which will perhaps now send me a free one—which, I suppose, I shall have to declare in the Register of Members' Interests.

The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point, which had not occurred to me. I have three months in which to declare that programme. If the rules were more defined, no one would make a mistake. I had not thought of putting in my television appearances. I think that I will then need my own book, because there are quite a few television appearances.

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman has made my point. I had not bothered to look at his entry until I noticed him sit down next to his hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover. I then took out the register, which is one of the greatest works of fiction I have even seen, and suddenly wondered where the bit about his television programme was.

I have often thought of asking the hon. Member for Newham, North-West how he got the job, because it seems to be a wonderful way in which to pass an hour in the evening once a week. I have often listened to the quality of the questions bobbing back and forth between the hon. Gentleman and Jeffrey Archer and thought that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I or many other hon. Members might "like a bit of that"—if I may use the vernacular. It is fair to say that I do not have one quarter of the hon. Gentleman's talent, and I am sure that the television companies are intelligent in picking him and not me.

I hope that hon. Members heard me say that, when I read the register, I noticed that the hon. Member for Copeland had mentioned that conference. I had not, and I shall have to do so. It was an error on my part. I want to make the matter clear because, although it is not significant, it is material. It was not long ago that I saw another hon. Member who had been on a tour on which I had been. I had to put that in the register, which I had previously forgotten to do.

Such matters worry me. What is this thing supposed to be? The entries of some hon. Members are so exhaustive that they are meaningless. Some almost say, "Was bought a cup of coffee by a constituent who thought that if he did so, I might vote against the Government and bring down the Commons." It is lunatic stuff. On the other hand, there are significant entries which say, "Nil." I look at those and think, "Nil on all counts? That is hardly realistic."

I list four directorships. All are unremunerated, because they are all charities. I regard the entry as significant because I should say that those are matters in which I am interested. I list a shareholding. I do not draw any money from it, but it is an interest, and hon. Members should know about it. I also list a directorship that pays me.

The solution to all this is straighforward. Without anticipating the Select Committee report, we should be far more specific about what should be in, what should not be in and why. I go along with what the hon. Member for Bolsover said on my second point. It is about time that we put numbers alongside names. The names mean nothing to me. One can open the document at any page and read fascinating names which are utterly meaningless in themselves. Some may pay an hon. Member nothing, whereas others will involve a considerable amount of an hon. Member's time which is given entirely voluntarily. Others may be worth £500 a year and others may be worth £50,000.

Am I doing wrong because, on occasions, I have had lunch with a lobbyist and have not put that in the Register of Members' Interests? He or she bought me lunch. Is that not material? The lobbyist wanted to talk to me and, presumably, to try to influence me. The hon. Member for

Bolsover was right when he said that the idea that that means that I would walk through the Labour Lobby is vaguely naive. I go further. What would I achieve? It is a pointless exercise from that point of view.

Where do we start and stop? We should just say how much. The President of the United States suffers one minor indignity: his tax return is public property. I agree with the hon. Member for Bolsover that the road of disclosure is the proper road, whether at national or at local level. This country has an enviable reputation for honesty and integrity which I want us always to keep. We must put amounts by entries such as "occasional journalism".

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. Gentleman is putting an interesting case which, I confess, I have opposed on the grounds of privacy. Even so, he puts it powerfully. How does he respond to the proposition that, suffice that hon. Members declare, they are entitled to some privacy? Does he also agree that a volume of money of a certain size might have varying amounts of influence, depending on which hon. Member receives that money?

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman anticipates me. I underline that I am a Conservative Member and that I have on occasion had significant income other than my parliamentary salary. As the hon. Member for Newham, North-West constantly tells me—he has made me a few offers for it—I carry my mortgage around my wrist so that I may know the time. The hon. Gentleman has been saving up to buy it from me, and I have it on good authority that some of his earnings from the BBC may shortly be coming my way. I do not know whether I shall have to declare that transaction when it takes place. If I believe that it is notifiable, I shall declare it.

The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) makes a serious intervention, and I assure him that I am deadly serious about what I am saying. On the question of privacy, one quickly realises on becoming a Member of this place that one should not have joined if one cannot take a joke. There are many things about this place that involve personal sacrifices. The media are likely to want to know a lot about one in all sorts of respects and, however uncomfortable that may be, they are entitled to do that. Part of that—because, sadly, there is always the odd rotten apple in the barrel—will have to be the sacrifice of a degree of privacy.

Before making that statement, I had to consider that it might mean my tax return becoming public propery. I hasten to add that it would be unbelievably tedious reading—that is almost the answer to the hon. Gentleman's intervention—in the same way as the register is unbelievably tedious. That sacrifice of privacy is an essential prequalification for the right to be a member of this place.

The register does not show the true worth of, for example, the free airports pass that is given to us by the British Airports Authority for our parliamentary duties. For somebody who uses it to the tune of £50-worth a year and who has earnings of say, £150,000 a year, I reckon that BAA will not get much political influence out of that. But for an hon. Member who exists on his basic parliamentary salary of £30,000 a year and who saves £1,000 a year because he uses the pass every weekend, it suddenly becomes material.

So the point about the Register and an open tax return is that it allows one the crucial ability to say that, for one hon. Member, it is derisory to suggest that his failure to declare some obscure night television programme for which he got £20 is a breach of faith with the House compared with some far greater perfidy that might be perpetrated for other amounts of cash.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have been listening with fascination to much of what my hon. Friend has said and am wondering whether I must now disagree with him. How would he extend the principles that he has been enunciating to the spouses of hon. Members?

Mr. Norris: I have always thought that a nonsense of the register is the way in which it ignores spouses, and there have been many famous cases where that has been self-evident. I want a Committee of the House to consider closely the practicability of including a spouse's tax return with that of a Member, and also the question of how far one should go. It is illogical simply to confine the debate on additional income to spouses.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): What about children?

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend—whom it is a pleasure to see joining us today when he has a busy schedule guarding our interests in the Community—asks about children. If one's child were to receive some remuneration, would that not be an obvious way to divert some money?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I agree with the hon. Gentleman and have argued endlessly much of the case that he makes about spouses. Can he give a sign of the extent to which, he feels that he has support for his proposition from his hon. Friends?

Mr. Norris: I cannot answer. The answer to that question is no.

When any hon. Member contemplates the scenario that my right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) and others have suggested to me, one simply has to decide on a cut-off point. That may be a spouse, or perhaps hon, Members will consider that an unnecessary extension. That is fine, but I would like us to debate it when there is the realistic prospect for real changes in the system. Members' interests should be understood before we make crass decisions.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Will my hon. Friend take the logic of his argument a little further? Would he go beyond spouses and say that the financial interests of the tax returns of Members' co-habitees should be declared? Or, if people are not formally living together but have separate addresses, although they are in a close relationship of one form or another—whether heterosexual or homosexual—should their partners declare their financial interests? Or does he feel that there is something special about the marriage contract and that the obligation should stop there?

Mr. Norris: My mind is reeling from contemplating the basis on which my hon. Friend has asked that question. I had not ascribed to him any of the motives that his question suggests, but I happen to know that his question is purely academic. I do not think that he is in any co-habiting arrangement, other than with his most attractive and excellent wife, on whom I commend him for his good fortune and perspicacity.

[Mr. Norris]

Members' interests are an issue that we should be talking about instead of the utter and arrant nonsense—the absence of reality—which this solemn document, the report of the Select Committee on Members' Interests, represents. The lesson of today's debate is clear. There is absolute all-party interest in the public knowing that Members of Parliament are justified in doing what they do and that they are making proper declarations.

The questions that my short speech has inspired have enthused me to take the matter further, but I must make it clear that it has nothing to do with Labour or Tory, with rich or poor, it is a matter which concerns the integrity of every Member of the House.

1.43 pm

Mr. John Browne: I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) wishes to have his debate, so I shall be brief.

I agree entirely with what my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) has just said, especially with regard to matching numbers with names. I also agree with him on the privacy issue. Here I point out that I introduced the Protection of Privacy Bill and I believe that my hon. Friend is absolutely correct, and so I agree with every word that he says.

I agree with much of what the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) says, but I shall take up two matters. First, he said that I should have apologised to the Select Committee——

Mr. Skinner: I did not say "should have"—I said that the hon. Gentleman "could have".

Mr. Browne: Oh, "could have"—the hon. Gentleman suggested that it might have been to my advantage to do so. I accept that the hon. Gentleman said "could have" apologised. The reason why I did not do so was that I thought that I was in the right and had nothing for which to apologise. I explained what I had done and that I thought that I was right. The Select Committee said that I was wrong—by sort of bending the rules, I think, but that is a matter of opinion. I apologised to the House in my statement once I had been shown to be wrong by the Select Committee's version of the rules.

The hon. Member for Bolsover said that my case was not like the Dreyfus case. I did not say that I was like Dreyfus, or that I received anywhere near the same punishment as Dreyfus. The point that I was trying to make about the Dreyfus case was that of the deliberate Government-inspired injustice and the Government cover-up that followed—those were the similarities to which I was drawing attention.

I disagree with a number of points made by the hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith), the Select Committee Chairman, particularly the matter of calling witnesses and the right to call witnesses. I was specifically told by the registrar on about three occasions that I was most definitely not allowed to call witnesses in front of the Committee.

Mr. Cambell-Savours: But not by the Committee.

Mr. Browne: The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) says from a sedentary position that I was not told by the Select Committee members themselves. That is perfectly true, but as everyone knows, when dealing with Committees, all of one's advice comes from the Clerks Office and the Clerks to the Committee.

Mr. Haynes: I am listening carefully to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne). Does he agree that there should be an extension to the declaration of interests? He is talking about a Select Committee, but does he agree that Members appointed to a Committee dealing with a Bill have a job to do? The party that is in power has the highest number of Members on the Committee. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, once appointed to a Committee considering a Bill, Members should not sit in the Cafeteria studying the *Financial Times* to see how they or their constituents can line their pockets by noting the state of the City while the rest of us are in Committee working away to oppose or push through a Bill? In addition, I believe that people should apologise when they have got it wrong.

Mr. Browne: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's last point. When I was told that I had got it wrong, I apologised to the House.

On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I think that hon. Members do a good job in Committee. I do not see many hon. Members sitting in the Tea Room reading the *Financial Times* when they should be in Committee. I believe that the hon. Gentleman is right to say that hon. Members should work if appointed to a Committee, and I think that they do. That is not to say that I think that outside interests should be abolished. I believe that outside interests should be allowed as they encourage the system of hon. Members representing their constituents in a more informed manner.

The hon. Member for Workington correctly said that Committee Members had not told me that I could not call witnesses. But Members have to deal with briefings. I was briefed by the Clerk and, in particular, by the registrar, who was calling me up all the time. I had only three brief sessions in front of the Committee, which were action packed and we were pressurised for time. It was the registrar who told me, on three occasions that I can remember, that I was not allowed to call specific people whom I had asked to call. I urge my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden to check this vital point with the now ex-registrar who was present at the time.

Mr. Haynes: The hon. Gentleman has not answered my question. When certain Bills are being discussed in Committee, one has to be there whether one likes it or not. I am talking about important legislation going through the House. On one occasion when we had a Bill in Committee I saw with my own eyes one of the Conservative members of that Committee sitting in the Cafeteria studying the *Financial Times* to line his pockets. He should have been working in the Committee. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that hon. Member should have been there working and not sitting in the Cafeteria trying to line his pockets?

Mr. Browne: The hon. Gentleman mentions a specific case and I have no idea of the details. All I can say is that, in general, I believe that hon. Members do a very good job on Committees. I do not know the specific case to which the hon. Gentleman is referring.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Just so that the record can be absolutely straight, will the hon. Gentleman answer a

simple question? Falcon company, the vehicle that the hon. Gentleman used, received $88,000 for the SAMA document and the hon. Gentleman knew that the Select Committee wanted access to it. He knew from sources within the United Kingdom that he was unable to get a copy of it. In light of the fact that he was repeatedly asked in Committee for a copy, did he approach the Saudi authorities to get a copy so that it could be provided to the Committee? Did he try to do that? I draw his attention to the fact that his reply is being given in the House of Commons.

Mr. Browne: Yes, I did. The hon. Gentleman was not here for that part of my speech when I dealt with that specific issue.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I was up in the Gallery behind the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Browne: I did not see the hon. Gentleman behind my back.

It was an interesting situation because the actual document, it is alleged, was stolen from my files. Mr. Leigh wrote some articles. Obviously he had read that document, or he could not have written them. I was then accused of not producing the document. The Committee's judgment seemed incredible to me when it knew that Mr. Leigh must have seen that document. So where was it? Why did not Mr. Leigh produce the document to the Select Committee?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. Gentleman has not answered my question.

Mr. Browne: I did answer—yes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden avoided answering the vitally important question as to why the Select Committee refused to accept for investigation the case that I put to it about the hon. Member for Workington. If my hon. Friend reads the record of the debate, I should like him to give some reasons as to why it was not accepted.

The Leader of the House made an extremely short speech. He said that the final decision was for the House, and of course it was. I believe that it was a heavily whipped vote and that that sort of thing must be wrong in terms of justice. It is quite right and accepted to whip an ordinary vote, but it must surely be very wrong to whip a judicial vote in the House.

Mr. Norris: I am sorry to intervene as I am sure that my hon. Friend wants to bring his remarks to a close and I apologise for extending the debate. However, I want to make one thing clear. As a Conservative Back-Bench Member, not the slightest pressure was brought to bear on me either way as to how I voted. I just want to make that clear. If it was, I missed it. It must have been incredibly subtle and it must have gone right over my head. So far as I am aware, no pressure was brought to bear on any Back-Bench Member of the Conservative party. I wanted to say that for my hon. Friend's reassurance.

Mr. Browne: I do not know whether that is reassuring, but I can only go by what people have said to me in the House. Hon. Members have told me that pressure was put on them through the informal system. If one reads the Division lists, it is pretty clear that the payroll vote was whipped. Ministers have confirmed that to me, but of course my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest was not a Minister.

The purpose of the debate was to raise the issue of Members' interests, which is a complex one. A lot of things need to be done about it in the interests of hon. Members. I wanted to present my case as an example in which many of those issues were raised. I think that that purpose has been achieved. The debate was very disappointing in terms of the reply of the Leader of the House, but I have no wish to pursue it further. Therefore, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

North-West Region

1.54 pm

Mr. Ken Hargreaves (Hyndburn): I beg to move,

That this House welcomes the successful effect that Government policies have had in the North West since 1979; draws attention to problems in the region which need to be addressed; and urges the Government to consider ways of so doing.

Unfortunately, unlike Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, for which debates are held in Government time, the only opportunity that the House has to discuss the north-west comes when an hon. Member is successful in the ballot for private Members' motions.

In 1979, the picture of the north-west in the minds of most people was of an area where workers were constantly on strike, where local government was dominated by left-wing extremists, where the old industries that had made the country prosperous were declining and where the industrial scene was full of restrictive practices and overmanning. That was not necessarily an accurate picture of the north-west, but it was the image from which it suffered. I am pleased that my success in the ballot gives me the opportunity to consider—somewhat more briefly than I had expected—the successful effect that Government policies have had in the region since 1979 and the problems that need still to be addressed.

The north-west consists of the counties of Cumbria, Lancashire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Cheshire. The region has a population of 6·9 million 1 per cent. fewer than in 1981. Between 1981 and 1989, there was 15·7 per cent. growth in the number of people aged 75 or over. Some 18·1 per cent. of people are pensioners and 20 per cent. are under 16.

A glance at the football league tables shows Manchester United at the top of division 1, Blackburn Rovers at the top of division 2 and Burnley at the top of division 4. Even I would not claim that Government policies are responsible for that, but it is success in sport, especially by Liverpool and Manchester in football and the Lancashire county team in cricket, for which the region is rightly famous and of which people throughout the country are rightly aware. They are equally aware of the name of Accrington Stanley, whose tie I wear this afternoon, although not necessarily for the same reasons.

It is enormously good news for the north-west that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has announced that the Government are to provide full backing for Manchester's bid for the Olympics in the year 2000. As Sir Arthur Gold, chairman of the British Olympic Association, said, "It is the most heartening announcement that British sport has heard since 1948." The £55 million offered by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will pump-prime the essential investment necessary for Manchester to make a successful bid. A successful outcome to that bid would be of enormous importance to the north-west. The gains would be the north-west's largest-ever inward investment, providing 5,000 permanent jobs, and the boost that a successful bid would give to the north-west would carry the region forward for many years. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for his announcement on Wednesday and for his assurance that the bid presentation will have Government support from the highest level.

In 1989, for the first time ever, more than £1 billion was spent in the north-west by tourists. Even that amount will be increased substantially if the Olympic games are held in Manchester. Albert dock in Manchester which, thanks to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, is now the second largest tourist attraction in Britain, with 5 million visitors a year, may well become the country's No. 1 attraction. The pride and confidence that Manchester enjoyed in the 19th century are emerging again today. Manchester's bid gives the north-west a new opportunity to lead the way.

There are equally successful stories to be told about other aspects of life in the north-west, but we seldom get the opportunity to do so and many people in the country —perhaps many in the House—will believe that another north-west success, "Coronation Street", is an accurate reflection of life in the north-west. Although it is my very favourite television programme, I have to say thankfully that life in the north-west has rather more to offer than "Coronation Street" implies.

When I was a child, a large proportion of my immediate family, friends and neighbours were employed in the cotton industry. Recession in the industry, hit everybody in the area hard, as we found to our cost. There were no massive redundancy payments for cotton workers who lost their jobs. Thankfully, the north-west is now more diversified and there is no doubt that Government policies have ensured that the north-west is in better shape to withstand this recession than it was in previous ones.

A recent survey in the *North-West Business Insider* concluded that the top 10 companies in the north-west were

"a varied and balanced portfolio with a healthy preponderance of technologically advanced companies, belying stock images of the region as the home of sunset industries."

That is a welcome development from the position that was faced in the past. The north-west is second only to the south-east in terms of regional output. Gross domestic product was £44 billion in 1990, accounting for 10 per cent. of the United Kingdom total. The region takes second place in the United Kingdom in terms of manufacturing, which in 1989 was worth £12 billion, 13 per cent. of the United Kingdom total. That is a tribute to workers and management in the north-west.

In 1989, there were 17,000 manufacturing units in the region, an increase of 23 per cent. on the 1979 figure. The region's business stock grew by 18·6 per cent. between 1979 and 1990. There were 152,100 registered businesses at the end of 1990. In October 1991, the *North-West Business Insider* stated:

"For the first time in decades the region has a manufacturing sector capable of growth."

In helping that growth to come about, we are fortunate to have the Agency for Investment into North-West England, INWARD, which is supported by the Department of Trade and Industry to the tune of £990,000 this year. INWARD has secured about 4,000 jobs and nearly £200 million of investment in the north-west. Last year, it encouraged 27 companies to locate in the region, compared with 16 in 1990. The last financial year was the best ever for inward investment, with direct investment of £39·71 million creating or safeguarding 1,070 jobs.

In 1990-91, about £450 million was invested in the north-west by overseas companies, creating 3,000 jobs and safeguarding another 8,000. Between 1980 and 1991, inward investment created more than 14,000 jobs. That was a massive vote of confidence in the north-west. It is good that some of the world's top performers—Pirelli,

Siemens, Kellogg and Nabisco, along with German and Japanese banks—are showing their confidence by investing millions in the region.

I do not seek to pretend that there is not an unemployment problem and that there are not business failures. Unfortunately, there are both, and I regret the problems that they cause to those involved. I am trying to show, however, that it is far from all doom and gloom in the north-west. Occasionally, we should concentrate on the region's successes and not its failures. All too often we dwell on the bad news and fail to react to the good news.

The north-west has not escaped the effect of the worldwide recession. That would be impossible. It is pleasing, however, and worthy of note that it has not been affected as severely as other parts of the United Kingdom. Thankfully, unemployment in the region as a whole fell between June 1987 and January 1992. Confidence has remained high. A survey of manufacturing industry's intentions show that 43 per cent. of companies plan to increase capital expenditure this year. It appears that 65 per cent. said that the recession had affected capital expenditure plans only slightly or not at all. That is a far cry from the recessions that I remember when I was young. There can be no doubt that the Government's policies and initiatives have played a large part in bringing about this change.

Sixty three per cent. of the region's work force are in assisted areas. There are two city action teams in Manchester/Salford and Liverpool. There are three DTI task forces and 14 training and enterprise councils, one of the most successful of which is East Lancashire TEC, which covers my constituency. ELTEC had a budget for 1991-92 of £17·5 million and 205 local firms are members of it. There are 3,500 young people on youth training schemes, 1,200 people receiving employment training and 500 on the enterprise allowance scheme.

There are four enterprise zones, which have resulted in an increase in employment of 21,500 since they were designated. The east Lancashire zone has been especially successful despite the lack of enthusiasm of the Labour party in Hyndburn and the scorn that it poured on the idea when the zone was established.

I shall deal briefly with national health service provision in the north-west. There are three regional health authorities—Northern, North Western and Mersey. I welcome the fact that in North Western, which covers my constituency, and Mersey spending increased by 73 per cent. between 1982 and 1990—11 per cent. ahead of inflation. Last year, £1·3 billion was spent in North Western and £753·6 million in Mersey.

It sometimes appears to be forgotten that the health service is for the benefit of patients. As someone who has benefited enormously from it, I welcome the fact that in 1990, 546,818 in-patients were treated in the north-west region. That is a substantial increase over the number of patients treated 10 years earlier. There was a similar large increase in the Mersey region, where 280,000 in-patients were treated. Day cases have increased dramatically in both regions—in the north-west region they are up by a staggering 73 per cent., to 139,987.

Those may seem merely cold figures, but they represent people relieved of pain and suffering. They are living proof that we have a fine health service, despite the Labour party's continued attempts to denigrate it. Such attempts do nothing for morale in the national health service and are unacceptable, coming from a party which when in government underpaid nurses and stopped capital spending on hospitals. Fortunately, we have reversed that trend, and in the north-west region 62 building schemes, each costing more than £1 million, have been completed since 1979. Capital spending for 1991-92 was £108·4 million.

Shortage of time prevents me from speaking about the maternity unit at Accrington Victoria hospital and housing problems in Hyndburn. However, I wish to draw attention to two further problems.

The first is the proposed reorganisation of local government—a matter on which different areas within the north-west region will no doubt have different views, some irreconcilable. That is not so in north-east Lancashire, where views on what we would like to emerge from the reorganisation proposals are almost unanimous. Local authorities there are working together to press the local government commission for unitary authorities based on the existing districts.

I support that proposal, safe in the knowledge that it is what my constituents want. The borough council carried out a survey of the electors, asking them what they wanted from local government, and the result was overwhelming suport for a unitary authority based on Hyndburn. The council also consulted all the companies in Hyndburn with more than 20 employees. Of those, 84 per cent. wanted a unitary authority based on the district rather than on the county.

I welcome the response of the people of Hyndburn and the responsible attitude exhibted by all the Lancashire local authorities to local government reorganisation proposals. When those proposals were announced, I was convinced that history would repeat itself and that I would find myself fighting off a bid for Hyndburn to be taken over by Blackburn, just as I did when I was chairman of Oswaldwhistle urban district council in 1969-70, and led a campaign against being taken over by Blackburn. We did not want that then and we do not want it now. I am thankful that the leader of Blackburn council does not want it, either, but the commission may seek to impose it, and I wish to warn against that.

As a lifelong resident of east Lancashire, I know how strong are the ties that bind local communities together. We are fiercely proud of our history and civic traditions, and of our contribution to the well-being of the north-west, and of the nation. That contribution was made first through the cotton industry, which I have mentioned, and more recently through the multitude of small businesses that have grown up since the demise of cotton.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities stresses that the Local Government Bill aims to ensure that the new structure of local government in the north-west and elsewhere reflects the identities and interests of local communities. Only local people can be aware of what those identities and interests are. As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) said in the Committee on the Local Government Bill, Members of Parliament should be careful about telling areas of the country that they do not represent and do not know well what form of local government is good for them. The commission needs to be warned, therefore, that any proposals to merge Hyndburn with any of our neighbours by drawing circles on the map will be greeted with outrage.

Local government has the potential either dramatically to improve or fatally to hinder the development of local

[Mr. Ken Hargreaves]

spirit and pride. We must take the right decisions on reorganisation, and one of those must be to listen to and to accept the views of local people.

Finally, I want to refer to the problem that arises most frequently in my surgeries and in correspondence—concessionary television licences for pensioners. It is hardly surprising that that problem arises so frequently, given the percentage of old people in the north-west.

For many old people, television is their major form of entertainment. As old age comes, it is more difficult for people to get out and about and television becomes an important link with the world outside. It helps pensioners to feel less lonely and less cut off and isolated in their own homes. Television and radio—and especially television—are a vital part of a pensioner's life.

People of pensionable age, perhaps more than any other group, understand that there is no such thing as something for nothing and that previous attempts to provide a free television licence to pensioners would have meant a large rise in the licence fee for all non-pensioner households. I do not believe that they wanted that to happen. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of unhappiness about the present concessionary system.

The concessionary scheme has existed for 20 years. It was intended to benefit pensioners and disabled people living in residential homes and comparable sheltered housing by local authorities and housing associations. However, changes were made in the regulations in 1988 following the Kirklees judgment. The new regulations more clearly define the type of sheltered accommodation that would qualify in future.

The regulations came into force on 19 May 1988 and under them the qualifying accommodation had to form a group of at least four dwellings within a common and exclusive boundary to be served by a full-time or resident warden so that the accommodation could be seen to form a cohesive self-contained unit with staff at hand, just like a residential home.

The anomalies that arise from the concessionary system cause difficulties, confusion and even ill feeling. I accept that when the scheme had to be changed as a result of the Kirklees judgment the Government could have withdrawn the benefits of the scheme from those who ceased to qualify under the new regulations. They felt that that would be unfair and included provision in the 1988 regulations that preserved the right to existing beneficiaries for their lifetimes, provided that they continue to live in accommodation that qualifies under the old regulations.

Consequently, in some schemes, residents continue to enjoy the benefit of a concessionary licence even though the scheme no longer qualifies, while people who move into such schemes cannot now obtain concessions unless they have reserved rights. Therefore, neighbours in the same non-qualifying scheme may sometimes be treated differently, with existing beneficiaries enjoying a concession which newcomers cannot enjoy, even if they are older and poorer.

The whole situation is confusing for pensioners, who had great difficulty understanding the fairness of the original scheme, let alone the present situation. The present situation is unfair and it cannot be defended any longer. We should seriously consider introducing a concessionary scheme that gives equal benefit to all pensioners and is easily understood and seen to be fair. The present situation is not understood and it is not fair: £5 for some pensioners and £78 for the people next door. In Lancashire terms, that is plain daft.

The situation could be made more fair by allowing all pensioner households to pay a £5 licence or at least have a rebate of 50 per cent. on the cost of the present television licence. The loss of revenue to the BBC could be compensated for by allowing advertising on Radio 1, Radio 2 and, if necessary at some hours of the day, on BBC1.

Advertisements leap out at us when we watch sports programmes on television. Players wear shirts on which there are company names. The names of products and firms are thrust at us on advertising hoardings at sports grounds. We may as well go the whole way and allow advertising during certain periods and use the proceeds to get rid of the present anomalies in the concessionary scheme once and for all. I welcome the view of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that the Government should set up an inquiry into the future of the BBC after the general election. I hope that the concessionary licence scheme will form part of that inquiry.

The past 12 years have been important, not just for the north-west. People in very different societies have had to accept that the nation's fortunes are made from their own individual efforts. In the north-west we have responded: there is more self-employment and more small businesses, and that reflects a new awareness of the need to compete. The emphasis of Government policy has been on the role of individuals to try harder to compete more effectively. There is now a different attitude in the north-west, even in areas which, in the past, gave the region a bad name. There is an attitude of partnership between local business, local authorities, educationists and Government who are working together better than ever before. That is vital if we are to solve our present unemployment problems and the ones that will follow from the peace dividend in an area in which the defence industry has played such an important role.

I am optimistic about the future of the north-west and the quality of life that we enjoy—provided that we return a Conservative Government at the general election. I was born in the north-west, and I have lived all my life there. I know the people. They are the kindest and most caring people in the country. During my time in the House, I have always tried to put their interests first, even at the expense of sometimes voting against my own party. So much do I care for the people whom I represent that if my party, during a recession, introduced a minimum wage, higher taxes and higher national insurance contributions, I would refuse to stand for election at the coming general election. The Labour party's policies will decimate jobs and do untold damage in the north-west. They will hit hardest the very people whom it wants to help. During a recession, such policies are nonsense, and the people of the north-west will say so in no uncertain terms at the general election.

2.15 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I repeat what my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) said about the new attitude in the north-west toward competitiveness and the idea that the market for products in our part of the

country exists beyond these shores. I commend my hon. Friend for all that he has done for industries in the north-west—knowing, as he does, so much about them.

It is striking that, in the past few years, although we have had an unfortunate recession in this country, there is no doubt that it has been less pronounced in the north-west because people in my region are rather more cautious. As a result, there is a lower incidence of debt even in respect of mortgages and business lending. That will do much for the region when the recovery comes. We can use a much stronger equity base in order to take advantage of increased demands for products made in my region.

There are undoubted problems, however. My hon. Friend mentioned the defence industries. It is useful to point out that, although we have a peace dividend, we still need to keep our defences strong. The Labour party and Liberal Democrats have failed time and again to make that point. We need a strong aviation industry based on civilian and military products. We in the north-east are dependent on military products. The Government's policy of maintaining a strong defence, rather than the huge cuts proposed by the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats, will result in a larger aviation industry in the north-west, as opposed to what would happen under a Labour Government, whether or not supported by the Liberal Democrats.

The other industry on which the north-west depends heavily is nuclear power. The Labour party and the Liberal Democrats want to phase out nuclear power, but 120,000 jobs in the north-west depend on nuclear power. Without that industry, jobs would be devastated, and there would be a spill-over effect on smaller contractors, retailers and people who depend on that inflow of funds into our region.

The Government's balanced policy on nuclear power and other forms of energy generation shows that we support the north-west. The Opposition would damage the north-west not only by the minimum wage but by their attitude to the two most important industries in our region —aviation and nuclear power. They want to damage the region's opportunities to move forward and take advantage of European and world markets for our products.

2.19 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): I fully understand the anxieties of the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) as he looks forward to the next six weeks because if, as seems likely, the election is held on 9 April, the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will have to defend an economic record in the north-west which, I am afraid, bears no relation to what the hon. Gentleman said.

Let us examine 13 years of Conservative government in the north-west and some key indicators that most parties would agree measure the competence and performance of any Government. First, between June 1979 and December 1991 unemployment in the north-west increased by 153,200. Outwith the south-east and Greater London, that is the biggest increase in unemployment of any region.

The other side of the coin is the change in employment. Outwith the west midlands, the north-west has lost 199,000 jobs. That is a staggering figure and directly confronts talk about the success of the Government economic policies during three periods of office. The disastrous trade figures announced yesterday show the change in manufacturing employment. In looking optimistically to the future, we look to the west midlands, the south-west, Scotland and the north-west, which we hope will play a major role in the regeneration of the British economy.

Sadly, between June 1979 and December 1991 the north-west lost 361,000 manufacturing jobs. That is not a small but a substantial haemorrhage of jobs at a time when not only the hon. Member for Hyndburn but Ministers have been making extravagant claims about the Government's employment record. If there is one statistic that reinforces the current crisis in manufacturing it is the one that relates to skills. Between March 1981 and March 1990 the north-west lost 11,300 apprentices. There has been a slump in jobs, a dramatic slump in manufacturing jobs, and the back of the apprenticeship programme in the north-west has been broken. That did not happen in the early part of the 1980s during the first or second Tory recession, but in the dip that we are now experiencing.

A job loss document that we produced this week shows that in the north-west 6,400 jobs have been lost in the first five weeks of 1992, the year of the single market and of major challenges throughout the world. We face threats from the Japanese and the strength of the Germans despite what the Prime Minister says, and Pacific rim countries are investing in skills and becoming commanding economies.

The statistic on which I shall finish is a statement on the Government's appalling record United Kingdom-wide, and certainly in the north-west. In January 1979, 62,300 18 to 24-year-olds were unemployed in the north-west. In January 1992, the figure was 103,253—an increase of 66 per cent. in the number of young people who are unemployed, after two recessions and a supposedly economic miracle. The sad state of affairs is shown graphically in yesterday's trade figures.

I cannot help the hon. Member for Hyndburn in his efforts to be re-elected in a few weeks' time. I sincerely hope that when the electors in the north-west go to the polls they will look at the claims being made by candidates and Ministers and will measure the gap between the rhetoric and the reality of 12 dismal and depressing years of Government economic policy. We hope that on 10 April in the north-west, and in the United Kingdom, we shall have a chance to start rebuilding the British economy.

2.24 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): I am grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) and for Wyre (Mr. Mans) for the eloquent way in which they have dealt with how the north-west economy is progressing satisfactorily under this Government. For the sake of the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish), I will put the debate in context.

In both employment and output terms, the north-west is second only to the south-east in size, having a gross domestic product of £47 billion—equivalent to 10·1 per cent. of GDP. Some 2·4 million people are employed in the region, representing 10·9 per cent. of the national total, and of those nearly 661,000 are employed in manufacturing. The latter figure is significant. Contrary to what the hon. Gentleman said, the region's manufacturing provides 27 per cent. of employment, compared with a national

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

figure of 23 per cent. That share and its long history are why the north-west feels particularly strongly about manufacturing industry, and I understand the reasons for that.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn recognised, there have been problems in the decline of the traditional industries, such as textiles, coal and steel, and to a lesser extent the ports. That decline is part of the natural life cycle of industries and sectors within industries. Governments cannot interfere with the natural order of such things.

I recognise that it is extremely painful for those involved in declining industries, and I know that the decline has cost many jobs. Between 1965—I hope that the hon. Gentleman will note that date—and 1989, around 400,000 jobs or 55 per cent. had gone from the manufacturing industries in the region. That is part of the steady decline that we have seen in the north-west, as throughout Europe. The once dominant textile industry, for example, which will be close to my hon. Friend's heart, is a typical example of what has happened in the north-west. Textiles now face low-cost competition from areas abroad, so we have had the multi-fibre arrangement, which is part of the general agreement on tariffs and trade, to ease the process.

We have also seen diversification of the north-west economy. With such diversification there is strength. The sectors represented range from engineering, the food industry, chemicals, the defence industries, and motor vehicles to the traditional industries to which I have referred.

The services sector provides the region with the largest body of service industry employment of any region outside the south-east. Important banking, finance, insurance and business services are provided in the region, which combine to make Manchester and Liverpool major centres of commerce, transport and education.

Despite its past decline, Liverpool remains an important port. Its performance since the abolition of the national dock labour scheme has been most encouraging. Manchester has more than 60 domestic, merchant and international banks represented there, as well as the northern stock exchange—a different picture from that presented by the hon. Gentleman. Elsewhere in the region there are important ancillary activities, including the Barclaycard centre in Liverpool and, in Chester, the headquarters of North West Securities and St. Michael Financial Services. That diversity now helps the region to ride the business cycle much better than it would have done with an over-dependence on larger, old-established industries.

It is no good the hon. Gentleman coming to the House today with the usual speech that we have heard many times from the Opposition Front Bench. The Opposition never give their answer. There was not a word in the hon. Gentleman's speech about their agenda, their plans or their policies—just the usual slogans, platitudes and criticisms. That is not surprising; the debate on manufacturing that we have had so often in the past few months has become wholly predictable.

The House need look only at the speeches of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) to see that. I have done an analysis of his speeches. In June he made a speech on manufacturing. It amounted to 57 paragraphs in *Hansard*. How many of those, do my hon. Friends think, describe his policies? Was it 20? Was it 25? [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Was it 30? [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Any advance on 30? [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] It was less than 30. To be precise it was just one.

What about the hon. Gentleman's next speech on manufacturing which was in October? Surely he could do better. Surely his own personal policy relevation growth rate would be——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. This is all very entertaining, but it seems to be of little relevance to the motion before the House.

Mr. Leigh: This is very relevant to the north-west, which is what the debate is about. We want to know what the Opposition policy means for manufacturing in the north-west. Of 51 paragraphs in *Hansard*, only one lonely paragraph was about Labour's policy. It was about Labour's small business scheme.

What a shame it is that the Labour party, time and again, failed to explain its policies. When Labour recently called a great conference on industry, it was going to explain its policies. Labour invited no fewer than 1,000 industralists to that conference——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should read the motion. He may then realise that his remarks are not very relevant.

Mr. Leigh: They are very relevant. Those industralists want to know what Labour's policies would mean to manufacturing in the north-west. Some 1,000 were invited and only 12 accepted the invitation. Manufacturers in the north-west, as in other regions, know that Labour's policies would be disastrous for manufacturing in the north-west. Let us consider Labour's minimum wage policy, its high tax policy——

It being half past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Bills

PROTECTION OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Not printed. Second Reading what day? No day named.

REFERENDUM BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [21 February].

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

SHOPS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

CIVIL RIGHTS (DISABLED PERSONS) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [31 January].

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Who objected to the Bill? We are all trying to do our best for the disabled. The hon. Member concerned should be ashamed of himself.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is sufficient that I and the whole House distinctly heard an hon. Member object.

Debate further adjourned till Friday next.

COLD WEATHER CREDITS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

RIGHT TO INFORMATION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

TIMESHARE CONTRACTS (TIME FOR RECONSIDERATION) (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not printed. Second Reading what day?

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

HOUSING (FITNESS STANDARD) (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

ANIMAL EXPERIMENTATION (COSMETICS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (SUPPLY OF MEDICAL EQUIPMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

SEA FISHERIES (WILDLIFE CONSERVATION) BILL

Order for consideration (not amended in the Standing Committee), read.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered upon Friday next.

YOUNG PERSONS' RIGHTS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

BINGO BILL *[LORDS]*

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House. —*[Mr. Fry.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I must tell the hon. Gentleman that Mr. Speaker regularly deprecates the practice of having a Committee of the whole House without adequate notice.

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 75 (Third Reading) and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

HARE COURSING BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wish the record to show that the objector to my Bill was the hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot). I want his constituents to know that.

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise to inform you that the excellent Bill, the Sea Fisheries (Wildlife Conservation) Bill, introduced by——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. That is not a point of order for me.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

ELIMINATION OF POVERTY IN RETIREMENT BILL

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

CARDIFF BAY BARRAGE (RE-COMMITTED) BILL

Ordered,

That the Order for the House to resolve itself into a Committee on the Cardiff Bay Barrage (*re-committed*) Bill, as amended in the Select Committee, be discharged and that the Bill, as amended in the Select Committee, be re-committed to a Standing Committee.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

TAXATION OF CHARGEABLE GAINS BILL *[LORDS]*

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Bill *[Lords]*, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

ESTIMATES

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 5th March, Standing Order No. 53 (Questions on voting of estimates, &c.) shall apply as if the words 'for the coming financial year' in lines 5 and 21 were omitted.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Child Abuse Victims

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

2.35 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise the important subject of Home Office guidelines on the preparation of child abuse victims for court. I am particularly pleased to see that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Department, has made it through the traffic and, at the end of a busy week, is in his place to reply to the debate. I say that not only because he is the Minister who has gone out of his way to keep his store open for his Back-Bench colleagues, but because of the particualar interest that he has taken in the subject, including being the driving force behind the one important improvement that has taken place in the area recently.

Child abuse is today close to epidemic proportions. In the last year, the number of children joining the child protection register in Kent was equivalent to 4 per cent. of the birth rate, yet all the caring agencies assure me that that almost certainly understates the scope of the problem. The statistics cover a range of what I can only describe as the most hideous tortures. Examples range from a little boy who had his arm broken in two places while his step-father forced him to have oral sex, to many cases of the gang rape of individual children as a result of a number of vice rings, and we now even have incidents of child prostitution.

My right hon. Friend has marked out for himself criminal prevention as a key area of interest, looking at ways to prevent the very young from becoming criminals. I put it to him that there is no better way of tackling that problem than by tackling the problem of child abuse. Indeed, my contacts in the teaching profession assure me that most of the difficult and rowdy children, inside and outside classrooms, either have been or are being severely abused.

There have been important advances in the wider areas, and I particularly welcome the White Paper, "Working Together". In Canterbury, partly as a result of that, the caring agencies, the police and social services, are working closely together. But in the matter with which we are concerned today—criminal prosecution for child abuse—we must face the reality that of all cases of children taken away from home where the burden of evidence suggests very serious child abuse, only a small fraction ever come to court, and in only a small fraction of those are convictions obtained.

One advance that will come into force in the autumn, as a result of the Criminal Justice Act 1991—the Pigot proposal on the admission of child video evidence—will help. The way in which children are treated in court and the lack of adequate preparation for that treatment has resulted in two unhappy circumstances. First, it is almost impossible in many cases to obtain convictions and, secondly, the treatment is so traumatic that the police are frequently unwilling to bring charges because they are not willing to submit the child to still further trauma. Either way, the villains go back into the community to continue.

The House will forgive me for reading two examples from an eye witness. The first is the case of Regina *v.* Etheridge et al. Allegations revolved around 10 children, who had been called into a room, one at a time, and subjected to various forms of sexual abuse by numerous

adults. Often, children were forced to watch helplessly while younger brothers and sisters were sexually assaulted. It was 14 months from the date that that came to light until the court appearance. During that time, concern was expressed that the children, who were so badly damaged by the experience, needed therapy. However, as criminal proceedings were pending, it was believed that therapy might taint any evidence that the children might give. There are no guidelines on the subject, but in the past the defence has managed to have a case dismissed because children had received therapy.

The delay in getting the children to court did nothing to assist them to give credible evidence. The defence counsel successfully made an application to have indictments against the defendants severed, which meant that the children were forced to give evidence a number of times at separate trials, each with a different jury. One gave evidence at four separate trials.

Even after that time lapse, none of the children were allowed to refresh their memories from statements. Again, there are no guidelines on that, but past experience suggests that in some courts that could be counted as coaching.

One child of 12, having bravely given his evidence in chief, was cross-examined by seven defence counsels for a period of hours, for a number of days. The defence ploys used varied from wearing the witness down—like dripping water on a stone—to overt haranguing. It comes as no surprise that after a time the child was prepared to say anything to appease his inquisitors and to escape the ordeal, which can only be described as secondary abuse. He left the witness box tired, confused and feeling guilty that he had dared to speak up. The cross-examinations left him with a deep-rooted hatred of women, resulting from his treatment by one woman barrister, who implied that he had invited the abuse that he had suffered.

We should ask ourselves whether we should be so obsessed with providing justice for the accused that we are willing to submit a child victim, who had been raped by seven men, to be flayed by seven lawyers. The fact that such cross-examination was not expected by any of the children made its impact even more devastating. Yet again, any preparation for it could have resulted in the case being dismissed because of coaching.

Frequently, during cross-examination barristers use complicated language such as "Is it not true that?", which caused the young witnesses considerable confusion.

One witness had travelled from Essex to Maidstone. He was tired when he arrived and, having been mentally prepared, he was left outside the courtroom for the whole day while legal arguments were conducted. Those included whether witnesses should be allowed to give evidence on a television link. Eventually, decisions were made and the witnesses were wheeled in to give their evidence. That acted as a form of psychological pressure and made the child witnesses nervous. It left the police virtually no time to prepare the witnesses for what to expect, whether for a television appearance—in which case they would have had to explain to small children that they were not going out in the middle of "Neighbours", but on a separate video link—or for the courtroom. As a result, the children were not able to give credible evidence and several cases were dismissed. Fortunately, some children managed to go the distance, and four of the accused received substantial terms of imprisonment, but the majority went free, straight back into the community, where they are believed to be abusing children still.

I shall call the second case Regina v. X. It involves the buggery of an eight-year-old boy, who gave his evidence at best his tender years would permit. Spectators have said that initially he did very well, and was able to repeat the exact nature of the allegations against him, in spite of the imposing and formal surroundings of the court. Despite his brave performance, the case took a turn for the worse. A clever manipulation in cross-examination elicited a retraction from him. The judge then asked him if what he had said was really true, to which the boy replied, "No." The judge immediately dismissed the case without making it clear to the boy to which part of his evidence the question had referred. In fact, the little boy meant that the earlier part of his testimony, when the defence barrister had confused him, was untrue and not his main evidence.

I wish to make two points from those cases. First, even police officers tell me that being hauled over the coals by a lawyer is like being flayed alive. One can imagine what it does to a child. Of course, children must be cross-examined in the interests of justice, but I believe that it could be done better.

The second and central point which concerns me is that, throughout their preparation of children for the ordeal, the police are walking on eggshells. We are fortunate to have in the Gallery two representatives from Canterbury's excellent victim support scheme—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The hon. Gentleman must not refer to people outside the Chamber.

Mr. Brazier: The police are treading on eggshells when they prepare children. Therefore, the first of my four recommendations is that I firmly believe that the Home Office should follow up its successful measures contained in the Criminal Justice Act 1991 with firm guidelines setting out to the police what they can and cannot do with child witnesses beforehand. Can they say to children, "You must tell the truth" or "You must stick to the truth even if a barrister is nasty to you"? Can they tell a child "A barrister may make false allegations against you"? Can they say, "This is your original statement", as they would say to an adult witness? The guidelines will be of value only if they have been agreed by the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Lord Chief Justice and, as a result, have been promulgated to judges.

Secondly, central to the issue is a measure which can come only from the Lord Chancellor's Department. The timing and physical arrangement of the trials are crucial, not only in terms of avoiding undue delay. If children are to be prepared properly, any changes of plan—such as whether to use a video link—should be settled well in advance. Barristers should not be allowed cynically to use points of order to delay proceedings and grind children down by making them nervous as they wait to start.

Thirdly, the balkanisation of trials must end. If a group of children produce allegations against an adult or adults, they should all be heard by the same jury so that they can assess the full weight of the evidence. We shall not obtain convictions if each one is stacked up individually, one to one, against the accused. More importantly, where a

[Mr. Brazier]

number of adults are accused of offending against the same child, surely one barrister could cross-examine the child and not one for each defendant.

Fourthly, in a helpful letter that I received yesterday and which dealt with a wide range of issues which stray beyond today's debate, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State discusses appointing an intermediary in court cases to cross-examine on a neutral basis for both parties. He rightly said that the matter was discussed on the appropriate amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill, but I should like his assurance that we are considering carefully the other countries that have experimented with that method. In the select committee in Congress, questions are put to various people by intermediaries, and I believe that there are some countries where intermediaries are also used in court.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State is, like me, a father and his concern goes back a long way. Day after day, people walk free, unconvicted, from courts, having committed the most appalling offences. That is partly because the police do not have clear guidelines on how to prepare children for the ordeal of court cases.

An important and worthwhile element of the wider programme of crime prevention among the very young would be the promulgation of clear guidelines, agreed with the judiciary, for the preparation of child witnesses for court. I very much look forward to my right hon. Friend's reply.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Does the hon. Member have the consent of the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) and the Minister? Yes.

2.48 pm

Mr. Rowe: I pay great tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) for raising this important issue, which he did with his customary clarity and considerable imagination.

It is important to emphasise two matters. First, all the evidence suggests that young children cannot be expected to recall reliably events of any kind, particularly traumatic ones, after the passage of many months. Therefore, it is essential that whatever the guidelines for court cases, when young children are involved they should be given the utmost priority within the legal system so that justice can be delivered rapidly.

Secondly, I hope that in the next decade of Conservative government my right hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues will give serious consideration to whether the current adversarial system is necessarily the best way to achieve justice when young children are involved. There is considerable evidence to suggest that a less adversarial and conflict-dominated system would be much fairer.

It is absolutely unreasonable, as my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury has said, for young children to be expected to stand up not merely to one adult, but perhaps to seven who, for the past 30 years, have earned their living in many cases by tricking people into making admissions that they might not otherwise have made. The present system not only leads to injustice, but causes severe trauma to the children involved.

2.50 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): I am happy to join my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) on his excellent and, in parts, very moving speech, which was forceful throughout.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent that when it comes to child witnesses or, indeed, anyone else, we need to keep our criminal justice system in good fighting form. That is one reason why my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary set up the Royal Commission on criminal justice under the chairmanship of Viscount Runciman. That commission will report in June 1993.

My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury has submitted evidence to the royal commission and if my hon. Friend for Mid-Kent has any further thoughts along the lines that he outlined, necessarily briefly in this short debate, he should write to the noble Lord and the royal commission to make those points absolutely clear. I know that they will be glad to hear from him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury has raised an issue of the greatest importance. We must be grateful to him for bringing such tragic cases to our attention and giving us the opportunity to consider procedures in child abuse cases. When my hon. Friend entered the House, the issue of child abuse was just being brought into the daylight. When my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent entered the House, I do not believe that the incidence of child abuse was so noted. The scale of child abuse caught all of us by surprise in the latter part of the 1980s and the early 1990s. Before that, it was a hidden problem, and it is a good thing that it has been brought out into the open.

I have tried to address some of the issues, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury referred, in successive criminal justice legislation that has gone through the House—most notably the Criminal Justice Act 1991, which comes into full force in October.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury is a great campaigner for justice in child abuse cases. As I said, he has made a special submission to the royal commission on that subject. He had the courtesy to send me that submission, which is a fascinating and thought-provoking study. I recommend that any hon. Member who is interested in this subject should ask my hon. Friend for a copy. I understand that he will make one available free of charge to anyone who wants to see it.

The Government share my hon. Friend's strong personal commitment to effective action on this issue. We must all deplore the atrocious crimes perpetrated against children. Like my hon. Friend, I have a young child and I agree that we must do all that we can to ensure that such young victims can be heard by the courts so that their vile abusers may be brought to justice. However, in the interests of justice, we must make absolutely certain that the rights of the accused are not trampled on. Not everyone who is accused and brought to court is necessarily guilty or rightly accused of such crimes. I am glad that my hon. Friend, with his characteristic fairness, made that point.

I agree with my hon. Friend that, in the past, the criminal justice system has underestimated the sheer terror that a court appearance can cause to a child. The stress of criminal proceedings for children has been such that many cases were lost or were not even started because children

were too frightened to face the witness box. That is why we took an important step forward in the Criminal Justice Act 1988 by permitting children to give evidence by means of a live television link from outside the court room. That was thought to be a daring innovation and many members of the Standing Committee considering the Bill raised their eyebrows. It is now thought simply to be part and parcel of what we should be doing.

How quickly things move on in that respect, as they have done in the Criminal Justice Act 1991, which carries on the programme of reform, and through implementation of the recommendations of the advisory committee on video evidence set up by the Government under the excellent chairmanship of his honour Judge Thomas Pigot, sometime Common Serjeant of the City of London. As I hinted in my opening remarks, we plan to implement this part of the Act this October, together with a number of other important supporting measures. That should mean that many of the problems facing children should, from October, no longer be there.

Perhaps the most eye-catching of the several changes in procedure that we made in the 1991 Act is the use of pre-recorded video evidence in cases of violent and sexual abuse involving child witnesses. A video of an earlier interview with a child—normally, but not always, carried out by a police officer or a social worker trained to work with children—will, in future, be allowed to stand in place of the child's main evidence. That is of fundamental and far-reaching importance.

However, it is no good having a video of a child's testimony if that testimony is to be ruled out of court as incompetent just because it has come from a child. That would be absurd and that is why his honour Judge Pigot recommended, and we adopted in the Criminal Justice Act, a change in the rules about the competence of child witnesses. We did a great international survey to find out whether children were more or less likely to lie than adults and it found that children were neither more nor less likely to lie. In effect, the 1991 Act says that courts should not presume that a child is an incompetent witness just because of his or her age. They must treat children's evidence, just like the adults' evidence, on its merits. This is an important change and should result in many more children being able to give evidence to our courts, and quite right too.

The video recording should also reduce the need for the child to recount his or her experience directly to court and this is obviously a good thing. The child should not have to relive events by telling the story many months later, and my hon. Friend rightly pointed out the delay in bringing some cases to trial. My right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor is giving his attention to this procedure, which can have a distressing effect on the child. The existence of such a video may facilitate earlier therapy for the child and serve to encourage guilty pleas.

I hope that the video will have that latter effect. I understand that, in America, it has been found that the effect on the accused of showing such a video so that he, or much more rarely she, can prepare his defence to the allegations made by the victims has led to many cases collapsing at an early stage. Often, when the accused has seen the child retelling his or her story on the video, this has had such an impact on him that he has pleaded guilty. We should not always think that what happens in America will happen here, but that is one of the net effects of similar provisions in some states there, and one can only hope that it will happen in Kent as much as in Winconsin.

The child's account will still need to be tested by cross-examination, but that can take place from outside the court room by means of a live television link. Seeing the video before he or she gave evidence would be a most useful way of refreshing the child's memory. The Act also bans the accused from cross-examining the child in person. I have always been convinced that we should do that.

Finally, with an eye to reducing the unacceptable delays rightly castigated by my hon. Friend, the 1991 Act gives a special power to allow magistrates courts committal proceedings to be bypassed altogether and get the case into the Crown court straight away. It also places on the courts a statutory duty to avoid delay in these cases. I understand that the Department of my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor is considering how best to translate that duty into practical guidance.

These reforms are pretty major changes in the law and I think that they will have an extraordinary impact after October 1992. I believe that they herald a new deal for child witnesses and much brighter prospects for getting justice in these cases.

My hon. Friend mentioned some possible reforms that were not made by the 1991 Act. He was kind enough to acknowledge what the Government have done thus far in the past four of five years, but he wishes to press us to introduce further reforms. In particular, he favours the use of specialists to mediate questions to the child in court. A similar proposal was made when we considered the 1991 measure in Committee and I considered the proposal carefully at that stage.

I do not have a closed mind, but the counter-argument is that cross-examination works best as a dialogue between two people and that the point of cross-examination could be lost if that spontaneity were lost. It is rather like asking someone to act as an intermediary for one of the interjections of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). That could not be done by someone standing in between.

In addition, there is the real risk that a third party might inadvertently ask questions in a way that was prejudicial to the case, or might simply misunderstand precisely what was required. It would seem that there are three pretty good chances of something going wrong through the use of mediators. We shall continue, of course, to examine international practice. We shall not hesitate to change the law if our monitoring of the 1991 reforms shows that that is needed. The reforms will not take effect until October, and we shall have to let them run for at least a year. We shall be conducting research and close monitoring throughout to see how they are working. I would be the first to tell the House that I am sure that in due course we shall need to make changes. We are introducing new territory in terms of court practice.

As I have said, the changes in evidential procedure that we have made should make it much easier to get the child's account into court and reduce the number of times that the child is compelled to go over the whole thing again.

My hon. Friend is concerned about advocates' questions during cross-examination. Lawyers came in for some pretty tough strictures during his speech and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent. They often do in the Chamber, though not by the lawyers who so populate some of the spaces on these green Benches. I believe that it is increasingly recognised that a good rapport with the child is vital to the successful conduct of the case. Under the new way of doing things, I do not

[The Minister of State, Home Office]

believe that advocates will think that there is anything to be said for trying to trap the child, which they have undoubtedly tried to do in the past.

We cannot remove the right of one of a group of accused persons to defend himself separately, not least because his part in the offence might be different from that of the others. The judge has power to intervene, however, to curtail unnecessary cross-examination. I think that allowing the video in as evidence-in-chief should help, as should allowing cross-examination to take place from outside the court room by live television link.

We are drawing up guidance for practitioners, exactly as my hon. Friend wishes, on the making of new video recordings. It is aimed at those who will be involved in the investigation of child abuse. We have revised the draft code four times. It is now being double checked by some child protection teams around the country, one of which I visited, to ensure that it contains the best possible practice. It builds on the guidance previously issued to police and social workers by the Home Office.

Mr. Brazier: Will my right hon. Friend allow me to intervene?

Mr. Patten: Yes, of course. We have about two minutes.

Mr. Brazier: Will it be possible for Canterbury to have an opportunity to make an input?

Mr. Patten: Of course—I shall be delighted if my hon. Friend sends in any representations from Canterbury, where invaluable work is being done, as quickly as possible. Speed is of the essence. As I have said, guidance is being promulgated.

The second element of the package, in parallel with reviews that my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor is carrying out, is a special joint project that my Department has set up with voluntary child care agencies, designed to provide better information and leaflets which are better targeted at child witnesses and those who care for them. Others involved in the project include the Crown prosecution service, of course. The leaflets may demystify the legal process and thereby reduce the child's anxiety and help the child in the interests of justice.

The overriding aim is to facilitate the testimony of children while keeping an individual child's needs at the centre of attention. A lot is being done—and rightly so—and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury for bringing these important issues before the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 17th February 1992.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Parkhurst Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state the reasons for not implementing Judge Stephen Tumim's recommendations to install low-voltage electricity points in the cells of A and D wings at Parkhurst prison during refurbishment last August; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Work on the refurbishment of A and D wings at HM prison Parkhurst began in August 1990, ten months before Her Majesty's inspectorate of prisons made its visit, and too late to incorporate changes in the contract. I regret that, due to an oversight, my response to the report implied that the work began in August 1991. The inspectorate's recommendation will be implemented in future refurbishment work at the prison.

Data Protection Act 1984

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many certificates have been issued under section 27 of the Data Protection Act 1984.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am aware of none so far as the Home Office is concerned.

Mr. Salman Rushdie

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now instruct the Metropolitan police to withdraw protection from Mr. Salman Rushdie.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is not for the Home Secretary to instruct the police on an operational policing matter.

Elections

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines are issued to town and parish councils about the use of polling cards supplied by borough councils in elections and by-elections.

Mrs. Rumbold: We issue no such guidelines to town and parish councils.

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to require parish or town councils to display prominently, in more than one place, the notification of a by-election.

Mrs. Rumbold: We see no need to amend the existing requirements.

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by how much the expenses permitted to parliamentary candidates will rise for the 1992 general election over the amounts permitted at the general election of 1987.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend hopes to lay proposals on this matter before Parliament shortly.

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to require parish and town councils to advertise an election or a by-election by issuing poll cards to each voter, where such poll cards are offered without a charge to the parish or town council concerned.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is for the parish council to decide whether it wishes to issue poll cards for an election or by-election when the poll is not combined with the poll at another election. We can see no reason for any change.

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines he has issued for town and parish councils on the publication of notices concerning by-elections.

Mrs. Rumbold: We issue no such guidelines. The requirements for giving public notice of a casual vacancy on a town or parish council and for giving notice of a by-election are set out in sections 87(2) and 232 of the Local Government Act 1972 and in the Representation of the People Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) Rules 1986.

Children (Section 11 Funding)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to extend section 11 funding to cover children from other than new Commonwealth countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: We accept the need to bring forward legislation on this point when there is a suitable opportunity.

Royal National Institute for the Deaf

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what investigations the Charity Commission is undertaking into the sale by the Royal National Institute for the Deaf of equipment available free on the NHS; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Charity Commission is not undertaking any investigation into the alleged sale by the Royal National Institute for the Deaf of equipment provided by the national health service. The commission knows of nothing to suggest that the institute has carried out any such practice. The Charity Commission has received representations about the institute's subsidiary company Sound Advantage, which is not a charity, and the commission is considering the institute's investment in that company.

Tadley Town Council

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the conduct of the recent by-election of Tadley town council, near Basingstoke.

Mrs. Rumbold: None.

Credit Reference Agencies

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will launch an investigation into the use being made of credit reference agencies for purposes other than verification by a commercial organisation from which credit has been sought.

Mrs. Rumbold: No.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make it his policy to introduce tighter controls over the access to information held by credit reference agencies.

Mrs. Rumbold: No.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to increase penalties *(a)* for misuse of credit reference agencies and *(b)* for release of information by such agencies other than after strict verification of the identity and purpose of any inquirer.

Mrs. Rumbold: None.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Conference on the Human Dimension

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many requests have been made by countries involved in the CSCE process to initiate the involvement of independent experts as agreed at the Moscow conference on the human dimension; and if he will list the subject matter of the problem and the outcome.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None. The mechanism evolved at the Moscow conference on the human dimension has not yet come into operation.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the occasions when the United Kingdom has used the conference on the human dimension inquiry mechanisms agreed at the Vienna CSCE meeting in 1989, indicating the countries to which the inquiry was directed, the subject matter and the inquiry and the outcome.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Kingdom has made use of the CHD mechanism eight times. Prior to the fall of the communist regimes, the United Kingdom addressed the treatment of ethnic minorities in Bulgaria, the detention of human rights activists in Czechoslovakia—three times—and Romania—twice. The mechanism was also used to raise two family-reunion cases with the Soviet Union, which was subsequently resolved.

Additionally, the United Kingdom has been associated with 14 uses of the mechanism by the member states of the European Community acting together.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reservations the United Kingdom entered concerning the independent expert procedure agreed at the Moscow meeting of the conference on the human dimension of the CSCE.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Kingdom made no reservations about the independent expert procedure, but did make an interpretative statement on the experts' access. A further interpretative statement on the use of this procedure was made jointly by Belgium, France, Spain and the United Kingdom. The text of both statements is attached to the copy of the concluding document of the Moscow conference, which is available in the Library of the House.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the success or failure of the arms embargo on *(a)* Serbia and *(b)* Croatia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are widespread and disquieting press reports of breaches of the embargo. We do not so far have independent evidence to substantiate them.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column *117*, to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham), whether he has had any success in establishing the identity and activities of the team in Yugoslavia which was reported in *The Guardian* on 17 January.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No. There are various unsubstantiated reports but no clear evidence.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the criteria by which Her Majesty's Government decided to recognise the independence of Slovenia and Croatia and declined to recognise the independence of Macedonia and of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We and our EC partners recognised Croatia and Slovenia on the basis of the report of the arbitration commission attached to Lord Carrington's conference. As for Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia, there remain important matters which require further discussion among EC partners before a similar step is taken.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current position respecting the accreditation of representatives of Slovenia and Croatia to the United Kingdom; what is the position respecting United Kingdom representation in Ljubljana and Zagreb; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Governments of Slovenia and Croatia have made no approaches concerning the accreditation of diplomatic representatives. There is currently a British consulate in Zagreb, but no representation in Ljubljana.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has had discussions with representatives from Yugoslavia about the proposed referendum in Bosnia-Herzegovina on 28 February in respect of that republic's independence; what Her Majesty's Government's policy is on the issue; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We await the outcome of the referendum with interest and will discuss its implications with European Community partners before establishing a firm policy.

Iran

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current human rights situation in Iran.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State told the House on 5 February, we remain very concerned about the human rights situation in Iran. The reports of the United Nations special representative, Mr. Galindo Pohl, following his visits to Iran in 1990, contain ample evidence to justify these concerns. A further report, following his visit last December, is due to be presented to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva later this week. We shall study this report carefully together with the response made by the Iranian Government to the allegations contained in Mr. Pohl's earlier reports before deciding on further action.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the proposed Westminster Foundation for Democracy; and what funding is being made available by his Department.

Mr. Hurd: I have consulted the political parties represented in the House about establishing an independent foundation, to be known as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, to help strengthen political parties and other pluralist democratic institutions in emergent democracies. The proposal has been generally welcomed and the body will be established under prerogative powers once the parties have all nominated governors.

The foundation will receive £200,000 for the remainder of the financial year 1991-92, and £1 million in 1992-93.

Lebanon (Arms Sales)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Government permitted the restart of arms sales to the Lebanon.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Sale of military equipment to Lebanon, as to other countries not covered by a specific embargo, has always been assessed on a strict case by case basis. We do not at present sell arms to Lebanon.

Kuwait

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration was given to the human rights situation in Kuwait, prior to completing the bilateral military agreement with Kuwait under the defence co-operation memorandum of understanding of 10 February.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We keep a close watch on human rights issues worldwide. They are important considerations in our bilateral relations with all countries and we discuss them with other Governments, including that of Kuwait, on a regular basis. There have recently been welcome improvements in Kuwait in this regard.

Cash Limits

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes he proposes to make in his department's diplomatic wing cash limits and running costs limits for 1991-92.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[pursuant to his reply, 6 February 1992, c. 215]:* With regard to changes to this Department's diplomatic wing cash limits and running costs limits for 1991-92, the details for the running costs limit decrease on vote 1 should be by £1,781,000 from £480,241,000 to £478,460,000.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Shareholders

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many shareholders there were in the United Kingdom in 1979; and what is his estimate of the equivalent figure today.

Mr. Maples: It is estimated that in 1979 fewer than 3 million adults in Great Britain owned shares. The latest Treasury-stock exchange survey showed that in 1991 share ownership had risen to more than 11 million adults in Great Britain. Information for the United Kingdom as a whole is not available.

Home Income Plans

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what submissions he has received from the Building Societies Commission or building societies ombudsman on the subject of investment bond-related home income plans;

(2) if he has any plans to review the regulation of lending by building societies for *(a)* investment bond-related home income plans or *(b)* other lending; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what action he proposes to take over the involvement of certain building societies in providing mortgage finance for investment bond-related home income plans.

Mr. Maples: The regulation of investment business, including investment bond-related home income plans, is a matter for the Securities and Investments Board and the relevant self-governing organisations. As regards the activities of building societies, the concern of the Building Societies Commission is to promote the protection of shareholders and depositors in societies. The prudential guidance to building societies on the subject of lending risks, and the corresponding capital adequacy requirements, were reviewed by the commission in consultation with the building societies during 1990 and set out in the prudential note on this subject in March 1991. Building societies have been required since March 1990 to provide additional capital to cover the risks associated with lending on a deferred interest basis, which is a feature of some equity release schemes. The commission has also recently required building societies to clarify and document their lending policies, which will assist in the maintenance of lending standards.

Private Health Insurance

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people over 60 years have been told they will not receive tax relief on private health insurance premiums because they have claimed for treatment which the Government do not consider would have been available on the national health service.

Mr. Maude: I regret that I have no figures on the incidence of individuals losing relief because of their having claimed for treatments not allowed by the regulations. It is my understanding that such instances should be very rare, because, in order to be certified as eligible for relief, a private medical insurance contract must only offer such allowable treatments.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax relief has been paid to the over-60s who have taken out private health insurance during each of the past two years.

Mr. Maude: The relief has not yet been running for two full years. In 1990-91 the relief cost £55 million and I anticipate the cost for 1991-92 to be £60 million.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the treatments which the over-60s cannot use without losing tax relief on their private health insurance premiums; and how many people, having claimed tax relief on their premiums, have had to repay those premiums.

Mr. Maude: Broadly speaking, no treatments are permitted unless they are already predominantly provided free under the NHS and are performed by a registered medical or dental practitioner in the United Kingdom to the insured as an in or out-patient of a private or NHS hospital. In addition general practitioner performed surgery is also permitted, as are various services such as physiotherapy or home nursing provided they form part of, or are consequent upon, an allowable treatment.

I regret that I have no figures on the number of claimants who have received unapproved benefits and who, as a consequence, have paid higher premiums because of a withdrawal of tax relief.

Government Shares

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list what shares the Government hold in private sector companies and their market valuation on *(a)* 1 January and *(b)* 1 February.

Mr. Maude: The table shows the ordinary shares held by the Government in private sector companies with the market valuation of such holdings at the close of business on 1 January 1992 and 31 January 1992.

Government ordinary shareholdings in private sector companies

Company	*Number of shares (millions)*	*Market Valuation (£ millions)*	
		1 January	*31 January*
BAA	14·8	78·7	83·7
British Airways	3·2	7·4	7·8
British Gas	0·1	0·2	0·2
British Petroleum	101·2	296·6	290·5
British Steel	[1]	[1]	[1]
BT	1,256·7	4,122·1	4,134·6
Cable and Wireless	[1]	0·1	0·1
Mersey Docks and Harbour Company	12·4	24·6	24·1
Anglian Water	4·8	15·9	17·2
Northumbrian Water	0·7	2·2	2·5
North West Water	5·3	17·7	19·4
Severn Trent Water	6·7	20·9	23·2
Southern Water	2·7	8·3	8·9
South West Water	0·7	2·2	2·3
Thames Water	7·7	25·2	28·5
Welsh Water	2·1	7·4	7·9
Wessex Water	1·5	5·6	6·0
Yorkshire Water	3·1	10·8	11·6
Eastern Electricity	4·3	13·4	13·0
East Midlands Electricity	2·3	7·9	7·5
London Electricity	2·3	7·4	7·9
Manweb	1·9	7·7	7·4
Midlands Electricity	2·9	10·1	9·8
Northern Electric	1·9	6·4	6·5
Norweb	2·6	9·7	9·5
Seeboard	2·4	8·1	8·1
Southern Electric	3·2	11·2	10·6
South Wales Electricity	1·1	4·2	4·2
South Western Electricity	2·3	7·5	8·0
Yorkshire Electricity	2·5	9·7	9·7
National Power	500·4	1,100·9	1,136·0
PowerGen	317·4	730·1	755·5
Scottish Hydro-Electric	13·3	32·5	32·5
Scottish Power	29·4	71·5	71·5

[1] Negligible.

Company Debts

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list debts over £100 million owed to the Government by United Kingdom private sector companies on 1 January 1992, not including debts arising from as yet unpaid tax bills.

Mr. Maples: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Merchant Shipping

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to meet representatives of the United Kingdom merchant fleet to discuss the effect of Her Majesty's Government's policies on the future prosperity of merchant shipowners registered in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maude: I will be meeting Michael Everard, president of the Chamber of Shipping, on 19 February.

Income Statistics

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing by what percentage the net take-home pay of a married man with two children on *(a)* half average earnings, *(b)* average earnings and *(c)* one and a half times average earnings has changed

(i) between 1974 and 1979, (ii) between 1979 and 1992, (iii) annually between 1974 and 1979 and (iv) annually between 1979 and 1992, giving (1) the average figure for each year between 1974 and 1979 and (2) the average figure for each year between 1979 and 1992.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 10 February 1992]*: The figures requested are shown in the table.

Growth in real take home pay at multiples of average earnings, 1973-74 to 1991-92
Married couple with two children

Financial year	*Multiples of average earnings*		
	0·5	*1·0*	*1·5*
	per cent.	*per cent.*	*per cent.*
1973-74 to 1974-75	1·4	0·1	0·0
1974-75 to 1975-76	−3·7	−3·9	−3·5
1975-76 to 1976-77	−1·2	−1·6	−2·9
1976-77 to 1977-78	0·1	−1·0	−1·7
1977-78 to 1978-79	7·9	7·6	7·5
1973-74 to 1978-79			
Total growth	4·3	0·7	−1·1
Average annual growth rate	0·8	0·1	−0·2
1978-79 to 1979-80	2·8	4·1	5·1
1979-80 to 1980-81	−0·3	1·0	1·6
1980-81 to 1981-82	−3·0	−2·6	−3·0
1981-82 to 1982-83	1·2	0·4	−0·1
1982-83 to 1983-84	5·0	4·4	4·3
1983-84 to 1984-85	3·9	3·5	3·5
1984-85 to 1985-86	1·3	1·3	1·5
1985-86 to 1986-87	3·6	4·5	5·0
1986-87 to 1987-88	4·0	5·8	7·1
1987-88 to 1988-89	2·8	4·4	5·6
1988-89 to 1989-90	1·1	1·2	1·4
1989-90 to 1990-91	−0·3	−0·2	−0·1
1990-91 to 1991-92	3·1	3·0	2·6
1978-79 to 1991-92			
Total growth	27·9	35·0	40·1
Average annual growth rate	1·9	2·3	2·6

CIVIL SERVICE

Working Methods

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what new proposals he has for changes in working methods in the civil service.

Mr. Renton: Under the "next steps" initiative, chief executives are given personnel management and financial flexibilities to enable them to deliver targets set by Ministers. "Next steps" is providing benefits to customers, taxpayers and staff.

THE ARTS

British Library

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will retain the reading rooms and storage space at the Bloomsbury site of the British Library for the next 10 years for use by the library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: No; it is not the intention that the British Library should continue to use the round reading room or other storage space, at the Bloomsbury site after 1996. The British museum is considering options for the use of all the space to be vacated by the Library. The return of this is eagerly awaited and central to the museum's future plans.

Library Authorities

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts how many library authorities he has visited *(a)* since his appointment, separately specifying those he has visited *(b)* in the past six months and *(c)* in 1992.

Mr. Renton: I have visited six library authorities since I took office. In January 1992, I visited two libraries in Wiltshire and I am planning to go to Berkshire, Newham and Buckinghamshire libraries next month.

South West Regional Arts Board

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister for the Arts what was the total budget of the South West regional arts board in each of the last three years; and what percentage of the total budget was spent in the South Hams parliamentary constituency in each of the last three years.

Mr. Renton: The information requested is as follows:

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
South West Arts Total Budget	£2,166,134	£2,280,090	£2,514,120
Direct expenditure in South Hams as percentage of total	1·63	1·43	1·44

PRIME MINISTER

Disability

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister what percentage of the work force of the Cabinet Office are disabled.

The Prime Minister: The percentage of registered disabled persons employed by the Cabinet Office is 1·3 per cent. The Cabinet Office is an equal opportunities employer, and continually seeks to encourage the employment of people with disabilities.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister what percentage of the work force of the Prime Minister's office are disabled.

The Prime Minister: None. For recruitment purposes, my office is part of the Cabinet Office which is an equal opportunities employer.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the Director of British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. concerning the transportation of radioactive waste for re-processing at Sellafield in Cumbria.

The Prime Minister: None.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the Director of British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. concerning the siting of the repository for radioactive and toxic waste at the Sellafield re-processing plant in Cumbria.

The Prime Minister: None. Proposals for developing a repository for intermediate and low-level radioactive

wastes are a matter for UK Nirex Limited. The Departments of Energy and of the Environment are in contact with Nirex from time to time.

Pollution, Northern Ireland

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he had with the directors of industry concerning environmental pollution during his recent visit to Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister: The subject did not arise.

Scotland

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to visit Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I hope to make another visit to Scotland in the near future.

HEALTH

Hospital Eye Service

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has had regarding the feasibility of collecting information about and monitoring trends in referrals to the hospital eye service; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Other than two parliamentary questions from my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham Edgbaston (Dame Jill Knight), on 20 December 1991 at column *356*, we have received no representations.

The Department collects information on the hospital eye service through regular statistical returns. This includes data from district health authorities on the number of glasses, contact lenses and low vision aids prescribed and the number of patients attending the hospital eye service in connection with these services.

Erythropoieten Treatment

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated number of patients who need erythropoieten treatment who have been refused on the ground of cost *(a)* nationally and *(b)* regionally.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the total number of people who have *(a)* been removed from national health service hospital waiting lists and *(b)* been placed on pending waiting lists prior to being added to waiting lists, in the last 12 months.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: If a hospital doctor decides that someone needs treatment they are either treated immediately or put on a waiting list for non-urgent treatment. In the 12 months to September 1991 nearly 2·8 million patients were admitted to hospitals from waiting lists. The names of a further 334,118 were removed from lists for other reasons, for example, because they had already been treated or no longer needed treatment.

HIV (Blood Transfusions)

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many non-haemophiliacs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland who have contracted HIV as a result of contaminated national health service blood/tissue transfers *(a)* remain alive, *(b)* have developed AIDS and remain alive and *(c)* developed AIDS and have since died;

(2) how many non-haemophiliacs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have contracted HIV infection as a result of national health service transfers of *(a)* blood, *(b)* blood products and *(c)* tissue; and how many of each of these groups became infected before the introduction of screening of donations in October 1985.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There have been 61 reports in England, Wales and Northern Ireland of HIV infection in people who received blood in the United Kingdom. All of these reports related to the period prior to October 1985. In addition, there has been one report of HIV infection in a patient who received a tissue transfer after October 1985 from a donor who was subsequently found to be HIV positive.

The total number of infected people thought to be alive is 30.

The number of people reported with AIDS is 29, of whom 23 are known to have died.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of people who received national health service transfusions of blood contaminated with the HIV virus; how many have subsequently been diagnosed HIV positive; and how many have died.

Mr. Waldegrave *[pursuant to the reply, 14 November 1991, c. 656]:* I have decided that the special provision already made for those with haemophilia and HIV is to be extended to those who have been infected with HIV as a result of national health service blood transfusion or tissue transfer in the United Kingdom. The payments will also apply to any of their spouses partners and children to whom their infection may have been passed on. The rates of payments are shown in the table. Similar help will be available throughout the United Kingdom.

The Government have never accepted the argument for a general scheme of no fault compensation for medical accidents, as such a scheme would be unworkable and unfair. That remains our position.

We made special provision for those with haemophilia and HIV because of their very special circumstances. It has been argued that this special provision should be extended to include those who have become infected with HIV through blood or tissue transfer within the United Kingdom. I have considered very carefully all the circumstances and the arguments which have been put to us. I have concluded that it would be right to recognise that this group, who share the tragedy of those with haemophilia in becoming infected with HIV through medical treatment within the United Kingdom, is also a very special case.

The circumstances of each infected transfusion or tissue recipient will need to be considered individually to establish that their treatment in the United Kingdom was the source of their infection.

A small expert panel is being set up to consider cases where necessary. I am pleased that Mr. Benet Hytner QC

has agreed to chair this panel and I shall shortly appoint two medical assessors to assist in this work. Further detailed work needs to be done on the machinery for handling individual claims for these payments; but payments will be made as soon as possible.

Parliamentary authority for making these payments will be sought through supply estimates and the confirming Appropriation Act. On the basis of the reported cases the estimated cost could be £12 million. However, I cannot be certain about the cost, as numbers of valid claims are not known.

I share the great sympathy which is universally felt for the blood and tissue recipients who have tragically become infected through their treatment. Money cannot compensate for this, but I hope that the provision we are making will provide some measure of financial security for those affected and their families.

Table

The amounts of payments to be made to the HIV infected NHS blood and tissue transfer recipients are:

	£
—Infant	41,500 each
—Single adult	43,500 each
—Married adult without dependant children	52,000 each
—Infected person with dependant children	80,500 each
and to the infected spouses and/or children of the above:	
Adult infected spouse or partner of the blood or tissue recipient	23,500 each
Infected child who is married	23,500 each
Unmarried infected child	21,500 each

These are the amounts already paid to people with HIV and haemophilia.

Tobacco

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total amount paid by his Department to campaign against the use of tobacco products in the past year.

Mr. Dorrell: In 1991-92, the Health Education Authority, which is wholly funded for this purpose by the Department of Health, will have spent an estimated £6 million on smoking and health campaigns. In addition, health authorities mount local campaigns from within their own resources.

NHS Executive Report

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of producing the national health service management executive report on the performance of the national health service in the first six months of its reform; how many copies of the report were printed; what was the cost associated therewith; who approved the cost; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Ministers are accountable to the House for all their Department's expenditure. The estimated cost of producing, distributing and launching 35,000 copies of the booklet "NHS Reforms—The First Six Months" is £34,000.

Clinical Priorities

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account is taken of clinical priorities in respect of the treatment of individual patients in implementing *(a)* the waiting list initiative and *(b)* the patients charter.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is for clinicians to decide when a patient should be admitted for treatment having regard to the individual's clinical priority. However, because we believe that no patient should wait excessively for any treatment, under the patients charter, we are introducing a two-year waiting time guarantee from 1 April. We are also investing an additional £39 million through the waiting list fund next year to ensure that everyone is treated within a reasonable time.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Companies (Trade Aid)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which 10 companies have been the leading indirect beneficiaries of spending within the aid trade provision since its inception in 1978; and what percentage of total aid and trade provision—ATP—spending each has attracted.

Mrs. Chalker: The ATP commitments since 1978 total £1,374 million. The 10 largest aggregate commitments by lead contractor were as follows:

	Percentage of total commitments
Balfour Beatty	21·7
GEC	8·1
Davy	6·3
Biwater	4·5
AMEC International	4·3
Snamprogetti UK	3·4
NEI	3·3
JBE	3·2
Phillips Radio Communication Systems	2·5
Marconi	2·0

Project	*£ million*
Balfour Beatty	
Cameroon NW Electrification	1·795
Malawi Power Transmission	2·590
China Yueyang Transmission Line	3·072
Malaysia Pergau Hydro-electric	234·000
Burma Bridge Project	0·090
Colombia Bridges	0·301
Colombia Bridges Extension	0·152
Indonesia Bukit Asam Railway Bridges	0·152
Indonesia Mrica Hydro Project	12·075
Jordan HV Transmission Line	3·611
Malaysia Shungei Ahning Dam	2·344
Paraguay Power Transmission Scheme	1·350
Paraguay Power Transmission Scheme	2·870
Peru Mini Hydro Project	4·852
Philippines Wood Burning Power Station	1·967
Philippines Dendro Power Station Adviser	0·040
Sri Lanka Samanalawewa Hydro Project	16·570
Thailand Mini Hydros Pilot Plant	2·500
China Beijing Subway	7·070
Tunisia Railway Equipment	0·500
Total	297·901

Project	£ million
Marconi	
Indonesia Shortwave Transmitters	25·911

Project	£ million
Phillips Radio Communications Systems	
Indonesia Forestry Communications	34·111

Project	£ million
John Brown Engineering	
Burma Gas Turbines Project	3·201
Burma Gas Turbines Project	2·213
Kenya Kipevu Power Station	1·959
Vietnam Haiphong Power Station	2·888
Panama Gas Turbines Power Station	6·727
China Chongquing Power Station	6·500
Morocco Gas Turbines	7·276
Philippines Gas Turbines	13·125
Total	43·889

Project	£ million
NEI	
Malaysia Sandakan Power Station	0·929
Botswana Moruple Power Station Turbines	4·418
Malaysia Connaught Bridge	23·485
Cyprus Dhekelia B Power Station	0·366
India Super Thermal Power Plant	17·034
Total	46·232

Project	£ million
Snamprogetti	
China Dushanzi Ethylene Project	47·179

Project	£ million
Amec International Construction	
Turkey natural gas conversion	58·700

Project	£ million
Biwater	
Malaysia rural water supply scheme	59·460
Sri Lanka hill country water	2·129
TOTAL	61·589

Project	£ million
Davy	
Egypt brake block foundry	0·884
Mexico Sicartsa steel works	34·943
China Bohai I	8·802
Morocco Nador roll mill	13·505
China Danyang aluminium plant	3·532
Indonesia Cigading/Serpong railway rehabilitation	24·690
TOTAL	86·356

Project	£ million
GEC	
China Yueyang power station	51·414
China Yueyang power station training	3·864
Turkey circuit breakers	0·940
Indonesia scattered diesels	5·891
Yueyang additional training	0·450
Bangladesh combined cycle gas power station	4·680
Bolivia mineral concentrator project	0·027
Egypt electrical switchgear	2·000
India Balco power station	33·066
Malawi telecommunications	0·052
Malawi telecommunications	0·026
Malaysia viewdata project	0·851
Zimbabwe railway electrification	8·068
TOTAL	111·329

Brazil

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, columns *149-50*, what was the total proportion of each project budget for technical and scientific co-operation with Brazil earmarked for long-term consultancy inputs, including management charges, costs of technical co-operation officers and travel and subsistence costs for consultants.

Mrs. Chalker: The information requested is as follows:

Project	Per cent.
1. Anglo-Brazilian Climate Observation Study	53
2. Caxiuana Research Station	12
3. Forestry Development of Aromatic Plants and Essential Oils	17
4. Jari Environmental Control Project	30
5. Tocantins Forestry and Rural Development Project	18
6. Demini Yanomami Health Care Project	nil
7. Floodplain Forest Ecology and Management Project	11
8. Tapajos Forest Management Project	[1]16
9. Central Amazonia Flora and Vegetation Project	29

[1]Includes short-term consultancy fees.

Projects 8 and 9 were approved since the answer given on 4 December.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Criminal Trials

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Attorney-General how many criminal cases were brought to trial in *(a)* the magistrates courts and *(b)* the Crown courts in each of the past five years; how many of them resulted in pleas of guilty; and how many which involved not guilty pleas resulted in acquittal.

The Attorney-General: Tables 1 to 3 give the information that is currently available. Table 1 shows the number of defendants proceeded against at the magistrates courts from 1986 to 1990, the latest available. The figures for the number of pleas of guilty are not separately collected. Tables 2 and 3 give the information for cases and defendants dealt with at the Crown court in the years 1987 to 1991. The information provided comes from two different sources, each using different definitions and collection mechanisms. As a consequence, the figures in tables 2 and 3 are not directly comparable with those in table 1.

Table 1

Defendants dealt with summarily at magistrates' courts in England and Wales[1]

Thousands

	Summary offences		Indictable offences triable either way		
	[2] Acquitted	[3] Convicted	[2] Acquitted	[3] Convicted	Total
1986	183	1,510	54	308	2,052
1987	166	1,168	60	300	1,695
1988	175	1,169	65	295	1,705
1989	197	1,192	67	256	1,712
1990[4]	222	1,169	74	262	1,727

[1] Source: Home Office.
[2] Charge withdrawn or dismissed (ie the court after hearing the evidence, decide the defendant is not guilty).
[3] Includes pleas of guilty.
[4] Provisional.

Cases dealt with at the Crown court in England and Wales[1]

	Guilty plea	Not guilty plea	[2]Other	Total
1987	59,218	28,006	8,973	96,197
1988	68,389	26,820	9,564	104,773
1989	64,570	26,830	9,832	101,232
1990	63,588	26,177	10,240	100,005
[3]1991	62,319	27,432	11,632	101,383

[1] Source: Lord Chancellor's Department.
[2] No plea recorded.
[3] Provisional and liable to revision in the future.

Table 3

Defendants dealt with at the Crown Court in England and Wales[1]

	Plea						
		Not guilty to all counts		Not guilty to some counts			
	Guilty plea	Acquitted[2]	Convicted	Acquitted[2]	Convicted	Other[3]	Total
1987	86,555	15,560	15,475	790	2,233	12,344	132,957
1988	95,866	17,542	14,507	792	1,760	13,004	143,471
1989	89,361	17,517	13,827	993	2,202	13,085	136,985
1990	86,845	17,241	12,752	1,012	1,978	13,862	133,690
[4]1991	82,305	17,663	12,701	1,460	2,595	15,440	132,164

[1] *Source:* Lord Chancellor's Department.
[2] Jury acquittals, discharges by the judge (not guilty to all those counts where not guilty plea entered only) and acquittals directed by the judge).
[3] Bench warrants issued, no plea recorded, indictment to lie on file, found unfit to plead and other results.
[4] Provisional and liable to revision in the future.

Court of Appeal

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Attorney-General how many defendants in the Court of Appeal criminal division were *(a)* granted leave to appeal against conviction and *(b)* refused leave to appeal against conviction in each of the past five years; and how many cases where leave was granted resulted in the conviction being quashed.

The Attorney-General: The number of defendants granted leave to appeal against conviction in each of the past five years was:

	Number
1987	400
1988	429
1989	460
1990	561
1991	662

These figures include a small number of referrals direct to the full court by a single judge.

The numbers of defendants refused leave to appeal against conviction in each of the last five years were:

	Number
1987	964
1988	913
1989	960
1990	891
1991	878

The numbers of defendants granted leave and whose conviction was quashed were:

	Numbers
1987	192
1988	223
1989	211
1990	256
1991	269

Legal Services (Wales)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General what further proposals he has to increase the provision of public legal services in Wales.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor has no specific proposals to increase the provision of public legal services in Wales.

Mortgage Repossessions

Mr. John P. Smith: To ask the Attorney-General how many repossession orders were made at Barry county court in favour of building societies or other lending institutions between *(a)* 1979 and 1989 and *(b)* 1990 and 1991.

The Attorney-General: The table gives the total number of mortgage possession actions entered and orders made in Barry county court for each year since 1987, the earliest year for which the information is available. These figures do not indicate how many houses have been repossessed through the courts as not all of the orders made will have resulted in the issue and execution of warrants of possession. At this stage, the 1991 figures are provisional and, therefore, liable to revision in the future.

Mortgage possession—actions entered and orders made in Barry county court

Year	Actions entered	Orders made
1987	184	127
1988	188	147
1989	170	94
1990	225	144
1991	286	225

Gulf War

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Attorney-General if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the report, "Needless Deaths in the Gulf War", published by Middle East Watch last November.

The Attorney-General: No. Copies of the report are already held by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence.

Immigration

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Attorney-General what is the average period between a visitor visa application being refused in Dhaka and an appeal against refusal to grant a visitor's visa being heard before an immigration appeals tribunal in the United Kingdom.

The Attorney-General: The appeal process does not start until an appeal is lodged with the entry clearance officer at the post overseas. This is the responsibility of the appellant and it is not therefore possible to give the average sought. However, it currently takes between nine and 15 months to process an average case from the date notice of appeal is lodged to the issuing of the immigration adjudicators' determination. This depends largely on the time taken for the parties to prepare for the hearing, over which the immigration appellate authorities have no control. If leave is granted, an appeal against an adjudicator's determination to the immigration appeal tribunal takes on average between four and six months, again depending on the length of time taken for the parties to get ready for the hearing.

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give for each region, and for Great Britain as a whole, the latest results of the youth training leavers survey, showing for male and female trainees and for each separate ethnic group and for those with a disability *(a)* those in full time work with the same employer, *(b)* those in full time work with a different employer, *(c)* those in part time work, *(d)* those on a full time course at a college/training centre, *(e)* those on another YTS, *(f)* those doing something else, *(g)* those who were unemployed and *(h)* those who had obtained a vocational qualification together with (i) the number of questionnaires issued, (ii) the usable percentage response rate and (iii) the percentage of respondents who were early leavers.

Mr. Jackson: As the information requested is contained in a number of tables, I will write to the hon. Member.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of *(a)* employees in employment and *(b)* self-employed in the Chelmsford constituency in June 1983, June 1987 and at the latest available date.

Mr. Jackson: Latest available constituency data for the self-employed relates to the population census for 1981. Information available for employees in employment is from the periodic censuses of employment and is given in the table. No census was taken in 1983.

Employees in employment in the Chelmsford constituency

September of each year	Number of employees
1984	42,600
1987	49,700
1989[1]	53,200

[1] Latest available.

Hexagon Community Ltd.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will visit Hexagon Community Ltd. in Liverpool in the near future to discuss the funding of the adult training programme.

Mr. Forth: Contractual and financial arrangements for adult training provision with Hexagon Community Ltd. are entirely a matter for the Merseyside training and enterprise council.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) meet TEC chairmen on a regular basis to discuss the matters for which TECs are responsible.

Training Contracts

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he intends to apply the White Paper, "Proposals for Training Contracts", to private education establishments; and if he will make it his policy to recover the costs of training teachers who have already left the state sector for private schools.

Mr. Forth: The effect of the change in the law that may be made, following the planned consultation on the clarification of the law relating to the enforceability of training contracts, will be determined in any particular case by the terms of the contracts of employment drawn up between the employers and employees concerned.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Price Waterhouse Reviews

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the total cost of reviews of parts of his Department carried out by Price Waterhouse in the past year.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not readily available.

British Telecom (Prices)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by how much British Telecom's regulated prices have changed in real terms since 1984.

Mr. Redwood: The prices of BT's main services, controlled by the "price cap" in its licence, have fallen by around 27 per cent. in real terms since privatisation. This control covers residential and business charges for domestic and international calls, exchange line rentals and directory enquiries, which represent over half of BT's turnover.

Industry Investment

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what investment has been made in industry in the Greater London area over the past five years; what were the comparable figures in real and money terms for the five years to May 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 12 February 1992]:* Information on investment in industry for the Greater London area is not readily available. The CSO publication "Regional Trends", a copy of which is held in the House of Commons Library, gives details of investment in the south-east region.

ENERGY

Privatisations

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give in respect of each privatisation since 1979 *(a)* the loss or profit of each company in the five years prior to privatisation and *(b)* any grants or loans made over the same period.

Mr. Wakeham: The information is as follows:

Electricity Council
Years ended 31 March
HCA Convention

£ millions

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Before tax[1]	(592·6)	1,444·9	1,441·5	1,166·4	2,117·9
After tax[1]	(592·6)	1,444·9	1,315·0	810·2	2,117·9
Total borrowing as at 31 March[1]	4,700·3	4,208·2	2,874·6	1,597·3	(181·5)

Amersham International
Years ended 31 March
HCA convention

£ millions

	1977	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*
Profit before tax[2]	4·897	6·656	6·014	4·011	4·079
Profit after tax[2]	3·350	4·562	6·405	2·777	2·663
Loans and investment grants[1]	3·870	3·918	8·002	8·935	15·229

British Gas
Years ended 31 March
HCA convention

£ millions

	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Profit before tax[3]	743	1,106	1,185	992	1,100
Profit after tax[3]	556	875	1,031	804	720
Bank loans and short term borrowing—(increase)/decrease[3]	(146)	31	(4)	162	(112)

Britoil (incorporated 1 August 1982.
Formerly part of the British National Oil Corporation)
Years ended 31 December
HCA Convention

£ millions

	1977	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*
Profit before tax[4]	(43)	(35)	69	256	435
Profit after tax[4]	(31)	(26)	33	67	73
Loans and deferred liabilities[4]	18·1	—	55·6	—	—

[1] Information from published annual report and accounts.
[2] Information from Amersham International plc Offer for Sale 1982.
[3] Information from British Gas plc Offer for Sale 1986.

* Information from Britoil plc Offer for Sale 1982. Profit figures exclude amounts arising on the discharge of advance oil sale obligations. NB Loan figures are not necessarily on a comparable basis.
Figures are not available for Enterprise Oil as this was not a distinct company in the years prior to privatisation.

Radiation

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many people have made applications to British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. for compensation in respect of illnesses associated with exposure to radiation from 1 April 1981 to 31 March 1991 and from 1 April 1991 to 31 December 1991; and, of these, how many have been successful.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This is a matter for British Nuclears Fuels plc.

Closed Coal Mines

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy who he proposes will carry the legal responsibilities for existing abandoned coal mine workings in his plans for the privatisation of British Coal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We have made clear that no decisions on the form of the privatisation of British Coal, or on the timing, will be made until after the general election.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many abandonment plans for closed coal mines are held by his Department under the provisions of the Mining Act 1871; how many plans are missing; and how many have been obtained for coal mines closed prior to 1871.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Under the provisions of the Mines and Quarries Act 1954, plans, drawings and sections of abandoned mines are preserved by the Health and Safety Executive or by other persons under arrangements made or approved by it. The Health and Safety Executive has made arrangements for the British Coal Corporation to preserve such plans, drawings and sections in respect of coal mines. No plans are held by my Department.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list, for each of the past 10 years for which figures are available, recorded incidents of the leakage of methane gas from closed coal mines, giving the names of the abandoned coal mines from which the gas originated, the dates of closure of the mines and details of the nature of any buildings in which methane was entrapped.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will bring forward proposals to require the adequate ventilation of abandoned coal mines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have no proposals for such action.

Electricity

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the market value of National Grid.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: At present, the market valuation of the National Grid Company could be of the order of £2 billion.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the number of shareholders in the 12 regional electricity companies.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There are currently nearly 3·2 million shareholder accounts in the 12 regional electricity companies. It is likely that the majority of these accounts are held by individuals who own shares in only one company; although information on the precise number of such individuals cannot be produced from the 12 separate company registers.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of "Decommissioning of Nuclear Power Stations", prepared by Fred Barker for the National Steering Committee of Nuclear Free Local Authorities published in January.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I understand that the Department will be receiving a copy of the report after its publication on 14 February.

Domestic Gas Prices

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how much gas prices of domestic customers have changed in real terms since 1986.

Mr. Moynihan: Gas prices to domestic customers are estimated to have fallen by 13 per cent. in real terms between 1986 and 1991.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

National Minimum Stipend

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, if the Commissioners have any proposals to abolish the national minimum stipend.

Mr. Allison: No. It provides an important floor for stipend levels and also helps to determine pension levels.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Common Agricultural Policy

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the Government will consider using EC funds to provide pensions to farmers and farm workers who are affected by changes in the CAP.

Mr. Curry: The EC Commission has tabled proposals that require all member states to set up an early retirement scheme linked to the amalgamation of small farms. The Community would contribute to the cost of the pensions paid to farmers and farm workers under this scheme. The proposed scheme is not relevant to the United Kingdom conditions because it is primarily aimed at amalgamating the many very small farms prevalent on some other member states, and we are arguing that it should be optional.

Set-aside Land

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the criteria on which funds are made available *(a)* for drainage of land and *(b)* for set-aside land; and whether land which is within an area with subsidised drainage can be eligible for set-aside funds.

Mr. Curry: The detailed rules and rates of payment of grant for replacement field drainage as part of an improvement plan under the farm and conservation grant scheme—F and CGS—and for set-aside schemes are set out in the relevent scheme literature, copies of which I have placed in the Library of the House. Expenditure on grants for the replacement of field drainage under the F and CGS and on set-aside payments in England in 1991 was £49,187 and £19,207,338 respectively. Land which is within an area with subsidised drainage could be set-aside provided it met the conditions for entry to the set-aside scheme.

Beam Trawling

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received in favour of the introduction of a beam trawler licence in the North sea; and what action he proposes to take in response.

Mr. Curry: The Department has received representations from one producer organisation and from the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations. We are considering what action to take.

Agricultural Wages

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which ILO convention is the basis for the establishment of the agricultural wages boards; when it expires; and if he will set out the conditions which govern the notice required to depart from the provisions of the convention.

Mr. Curry: The United Kingdom is a signatory to two Conventions of the International Labour Organisation —(ILO)—the terms of which are satisfied by the existence of the Agricultural Wages Board—AWB. The ILO conventions do not give the AWB its powers which are provided under the provisions of the Agricultural Wages Act 1948. ILO convention 99 requires signatories to create or maintain adequate machinery whereby minimum rates of wages can be fixed for agricultural workers. This convention may be denounced only within a 12-month period of 'window' which occurs every 10 years. The next such window is open from 23 August 1993 to 22 August 1994. Convention 101 requires signatories to ensure workers employed in agriculture are granted annual holiday with pay. The window for denunciation for this convention is next open from 24 July 1994 to 23 July 1995. In both cases, ILO rules lay down that a denunciation would not take effect until one year after its registration with the ILO.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current and future role of the Agricultural Wages Board, with particular reference to its minimum wage setting functions.

Mr. Curry: The Agricultural Wages Board is set up under the provisions of the Agricultural Wages Act 1948 and is responsible for prescribing the minimum rates of pay and conditions of service within the agriculture industry. As with all similar bodies, the role of the AWB is reviewed from time to time. There are presently no plans to alter the status of the board or its minimum wage fixing responsibilities.

South West Regional Centre

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on the siting of the new south-west regional centre of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) on 14 February, *Official Report*, column *645*.

Farmers (Regulations and Licences)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish his list of every requirement that the Ministry or the European Community places on farmers.

Mr. Gummer: The list is a working document and not intended for official publication. I have arranged for a copy to be made available in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the organisations with which he is having discussions about the regulations and licences imposed on farmers by his Ministry or the European Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I am currently having discussions with the National Farmers Union about the regulations and licences imposed on farmers by my Department or the European Community. I am also having discussions with national organisations representing agricultural producers who are subject to these legislative requirements.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle that have been confirmed with BSE until the end of January were born after July 1988.

Mr. Gummer: Up to the end of January, there have been 16 confirmed cases of BSE in cattle born after 18 July 1988 when the ban on feeding ruminant derived protein to ruminants was introduced. One of these, as previously announced, may have been a case of maternal transmission. Investigations are still continuing into some cases, while for others interpretation of data is incomplete, but it is already clear that most had probably received some ruminant protein largely by carry over of feed produced before the ban.

MacSharry Proposals

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the manpower and resource implications for his Ministry of the implementation of the MacSharry proposals in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The manpower and resource implications of reforming the CAP will depend on detailed decisions yet to be made. The Government are arguing for changes to CAP regimes that will minimise the administrative burden for both farmers and the Government.

Organic Farming

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his meeting with organic farmers on 5 February.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend the Minister met representatives of the Soil Association and British Organic Farmers/Organic Growers Association on 5 February. Support for organic farming was discussed in the context of proposals made within the agrienvironment part of the MacSharry proposals for reform of the common agricultural policy. My right hon. Friend reiterated his view that environmental measures should be a central feature of CAP reform and that support for organic farming could make a useful contribution to the reduction of surpluses.

However, he stressed that support for organic farming was only one of many issues to be discussed in the CAP negotiations and that the eventual outcome of those negotiations is, inevitably, uncertain.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Scottish Affairs Committee

38. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has for hon. Members representing constituencies in England, Wales or Northern Ireland to be appointed to the Scottish Affairs Committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Since at present there is no such Committee the issue does not yet arise.

Annunciators

39. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Lord President of the Council how many annunciators there are in the House; what plans he has to add to this number; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The present annunciator system consists of about 1,500 black and white television monitors distributed throughout the parliamentary estate. In the phase 1 buildings—1 Parliament street and 1 Derby gate —modern television receivers provide both the annunciator service and a number of public service television channels, including teletext. It is expected that the existing annunciator sets in the remainder of the parliamentary estate will be replaced by early 1994, as part of the programme to instal a dual data and video network for Members, their staff and staff of the House.

Procedure

40. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what comparative studies he has undertaken of parliamentary procedure in other legislatures.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend may know that during the last summer recess I paid an official visit to Australia and New Zealand where, amongst other engagements, I had discussions with the Speakers and other parliamentary leaders and officials from both the national and state legislatures.

Office Security

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Lord President of the Council what recent discussions he has had in respect of improving security in Members' offices.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer to the reply that I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon).

Members' Allowances

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list *(a)* the different expenses and administrative allowances available to hon. Members and *(b)* the information he has on similar financial provisions in the parliamentary assemblies of (i) the United States of America, (ii) Germany, (iii) France, (iv) Spain and (v) the European Parliament, specifying the different cash amounts in pound sterling terms, on the latest available relevant statistics.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 29 January 1992]:*

Information on the allowances for Members of the Spanish Congress of Deputies is not available. The other information requested is as follows:

ALLOWANCES

UNITED KINGDOM

MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Subsistence and Constituency Costs

Additional Costs Allowance of up to £10,786 for those with constituencies outside London for cost of maintaining second home. Local allowance of £1,222 for those with constituencies in London.

Travel

Free travel to and from House on Parliamentary business in United Kingdom and/or motor mileage allowance of up to 20,000 miles at following rates (in pence per mile):

		further mileage
1,300 cc	28·8	15·1
1,301cc-2,300 cc	43·4	19·9
2,301cc +	68·2	34·1

One free trip per year to EC institution—return Business Class airfare and two nights subsistence.

Office Secretarial Assistance

Office Costs Allowance of up to £28,986 (+10 per cent. for pension contributions of any staff employed).

Postage

Free inland postage.

Telephone Charges

Free inland telephone charges.

Allowance

UNITED STATES

MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Subsistence and Constituency Costs

Covered by House Committee budgets.

Travel

Official Expenses Allowance covers domestic travel to and from constituency.

Travel on committee business is paid from committee budgets.

Official and Secretarial Assistance

Clerk Hire allowance of US $537,480 per annum (£295,725) to hire up to 18 permanent and 4 non-permanent staff.

Base Official Expenses Allowances of US $122,500 (£67,400) but may be increased to reflect constituency distance from Washington. Covers district travel, district office lease, stationery, telecommunications, mass mailing, postage, computer services, and official expenses in general. Now incorporates up to US $35,000 (£19,257) for equipping district offices.

An official Entertainment Allowance ranging between US $ 175,000 (£96,286) and US $275,000 (£151,307) is paid to most members.

Postage

Official Mail Allowance averaging US $175,000 (£96,286) per annum.

Telephone Charges

Allowance

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

MEMBER OF THE BUNDESTAG

Subsistence and Constituency Costs

Costs of maintaining a second home met from Office Allowance (see below).

Hotel room bills paid when overnight stay is necessary —DM 39 (£14) per night basic.

Accommodation and subsistence (variable depending on country visited) also paid on official trips abroad. Up to DM 334 (£116) maximum if bills are submitted.

Travel

Free first class season ticket for rail travel, including sleeper tickets.

Free first class air travel for official internal flights.

Free use of the Bundestag fleet of official cars for trips within 20 km around Bonn and to Bonn-Cologne airport.

Free first class flight and local transport costs for official trips abroad.

Office and Secretarial Assistance

Secretarial and research costs of DM 12,296 (£4,284) per month for one secretary in Bonn, one in constituency and one researcher.

Office equipment allowance provides DM 2,000 (£697) per year for running costs (DM 2,500 (£871) in first year for initial equipping of office).

Free stationery.

DM 5,765 (£2,009) per month, covering office costs, including constituency office.

Postage

Free postage from Bonn (constituency postage is met from constituency costs), 3 fax machines provided—up to DM 4,000 (£1,394) per year fax running costs.

Telephone Charges

Free telephone calls from Bonn (worldwide).

ALLOWANCES

FRANCE

DEPUTY IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Subsistence and Constituency costs

Between 3 and 10 percent of salary, depending upon distance of constituency from Paris. Current salary is FFr 29,113 (£2,977) per month.

Travel

Free railway pass for first class and sleeper carriages.

40 free internal return flights.

All travel may be accompanied by spouse at half price.

Toll charges between Paris and constituency are reimbursed but only on official business.

Office and Secretarial costs

Secretarial allowance of FFr 24,588 (£2,514) per month to cover typist and other office expenses.

Contribution towards cost of research assistants etc. FFr 24,788 (£2,535) per month.

Free stationery.

Postage

Free postage. Subsidised fax for constituency.

Telephone Charges

Free inland calls from Assembly or constituency.

ALLOWANCE

MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Subsistence and Constituency Costs

Subsistence Allowance of ECU 180 (£128) per day for attending meetings within the EC territory plus cost of overnight accommodation etc. for attending meetings outside territory.

Travel

Flat rate travel allowance of ECU 0·70 (£0·50) per kilometre for the first 800km and ECU 0·35 (£0·25) for additional mileage for travel within the community to attend meetings.

Reimbursement of the return air fare by the most direct route for travel outside EC territory to attend meetings.

Travel Allowance of up to 2,500 (£1,779) per annum for travel in performance of duties other than to attend meetings.

Office and Secretarial Assistance

Secretarial Assistance Allowance of up to ECU 6,172 (£4,391) per month.

General Expenditure Allowance of ECU 2,607 (£1,855) per month for office management costs, telephone, postage and travel within Member states.[2]

Postage

See General Expenditure Allowance.

Telephone Charges

See General Expenditure Allowance.

Notes:

[1] The sterling figures were calculated using rates of exchange at the close of business on 6 February 1992.

[2] Halved in respect of Members who, for no valid reason, have failed to attend at least half the number of plenary sittings.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Elderly People (Benefits)

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will launch a major and continuing publicity and information exercise aimed at the elderly to encourage them in the take-up of their rights and entitlements to benefits.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans for a single campaign of the kind described, but we continue to consider the particular needs of elderly people.

Recent initiatives include a new leaflet for older pensioners, linking benefits at significant life changes is being produced with the help of agencies.

Advertising campaigns supported by leaflets and posters for cold weather payments are mounted whenever and wherever severe weather conditions occur.

More general leaflets, for elderly people on low incomes and who are sick and disabled are distributed to post offices, including a leaflet on what to do when someone dies. We have also redesigned claim forms to benefit elderly people.

Agencies, such as citizens advice bureaux are kept informed through a mailing list. GPs, hospitals and clinics; day centres and homes, Age Concern; ministers of religion; chemists; libraries, also receive information.

A new leaflet, "Caring for Someone?", EB31, was issued in November 1991 for long-term sick and disabled people.

A new helpline—0253 858858—for war pensioners came into service last month, supported by a new leaflet to publicise the service.

On 2 and 9 April 1992 special BBC/DSS programmes for the elderly will be screened by "Advice Shop".

The BBC select—night-time service—will broadcast a 15-minute programme with information for carers of elderly people.

The Department will continue to give specific attention to the ongoing information needs of elderly people.

Community Care Grants

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Oldham, West of 17 January concerning high priority applications for community care grants to the Cambridge district office.

Mr. Scott: I replied to the hon. Member today.

Council Tax

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to the answer of 13 December by the Prime Minister, *Official Report*, column *553*, if he will give details of the examination which has taken place into the impact upon claimants in receipt of family credit and the new disability working allowance of increasing the taper for the proposed council tax rebates to 20 per cent.; and if he will show the results of that examination.

Miss Widdecombe: The proposed council tax benefit taper of 20 per cent. needs to be considered in the context of the introduction of 100 per cent. maximum rebates. There will be no minimum contribution to the council tax and income-related benefit levels will not be adjusted, despite the fact that people will no longer be expected to make a 20 per cent. contribution to the community charge.

The effect of the higher taper on those people who receive family credit or disability working allowance, and housing benefit as well as council tax benefit, will be very small. Their marginal deduction rate will increase slightly from 96 to 97 per cent.

Source: Modelled using data drawn from the 1987-88 family expenditure surveys at 1991-92 prices and estimated benefit levels.

Single Mothers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he has received regarding officers of his Department threatening or actually cutting off income support from single mothers who refuse to name the father of their child, in advance of the operation of the Child Support Act 1991 in April.

Mr. Jack: We have received seven representations in which this allegation has been made. We take such allegations very seriously, and we have made clear at all times that, while our current policy is to encourage single mothers to co-operate with the Department in obtaining maintenance for their children, nothing must be said or done to suggest that income support can be reduced or not paid if they refuse to co-operate. Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, shares our concern that the current procedures must be followed in all cases and is happy to investigate any case referred through to him. Steps have been taken to ensure that the correct procedures are followed, and these include sending a bulletin to all offices which sets out again how officers should deal with these sensitive matters. While it is clearly wrong to give a misleading impression to single parents about the possible consequences of not providing information, nevertheless it is right to expect single mothers to co-operate in obtaining maintenance where there is no good reason not to do so, and liable relative officers are advised to proceed in that expectation.

Pension Funds (Regulation)

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will introduce regulations to place restrictions on the investment of the assets of occupational pension schemes in employer-related investments.

Mr. Newton: I have today laid before Parliament regulations under schedule 4 to the Social Security Act 1990 which will restrict to 5 per cent. the proportion of their resources which occupational pension schemes may invest in the sponsoring company, or any other company associated or connected with it. The regulations will come into effect on 9 March 1992.

The provision in the Act implemented a recommendation by the independent Occupational Pensions Board in its 1989 report entitled "Protecting Pensions" that self-investment should be restricted to 5 per cent.

The regulations follow a period of consultation with the board and with industry about how this objective can be achieved without causing undue difficulties for companies whose schemes already involve significant self-investment. The regulations therefore include transitional provisions which will give schemes time to reduce any existing self-investment, but which will prohibit the acquisition of any new self-investment while the 5 per cent. limit is exceeded.

Where self-investment exceeds 5 per cent. on 9 March 1992, transitional arrangements permit self-investment to continue to exceed 5 per cent., but only in the following restricted circumstances:—

- where a pension scheme has made a loan to the sponsoring employer which is current on 17 February 1992, the employer must repay the loan to the pension fund to reduce self-investment to 5 per cent. by 8 March 1994 or, if later, the earliest date on which repayment can be enforced;
- where a pension scheme has more than 5 per cent. of its assets invested in the sponsoring or associated company in the form of equity of that company listed on a recognised stock exchange, the scheme's holding must be reduced to 5 per cent. by 8 March 1994;
- where a pension scheme has more than 5 per cent. of its assets invested in the sponsoring or associated company in the form of equity traded on a second tier market of a recognised stock exchange, the scheme's holding must be reduced to 5 per cent. by 8 March 1997;
- a pension scheme may continue indefinitely to hold more than 5 per cent. of its assets in the sponsoring or associated company in the form of the equity of the company if a private company or in the form of property leased to the company. While however the self-investment exceeds 5 per cent. the pension scheme may not acquire any additional self-investment.

The self-investment restrictions do not apply to:—
—the investments of small self-administered schemes where the number of members is fewer than 12, all the members are trustees and all the members have agreed in writing to the self-investment;
—individual insurance arrangements where the member agrees in writing to the insurance company investing in the member's company;
—employer-related investment held in bank or building society accounts;
—employer-related investment derived from members' additional voluntary contributions.

The regulations also impose an obligation on pension scheme trustees to disclose to scheme members, beneficiaries and trade union details of any self-investment, whether it exceeds 5 per cent., and whether, and if so how, they propose to reduce the percentage.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consideration is being given by his Department to any changes that may now be necessary to pension fund regulation; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 20 December 1991 at columns *374-75* and to my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) today.

Income Assessment

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will now consider changing the assumed level of weekly income of £1 for every £250 in savings which is taken into consideration when assessing community charge rebates and other social benefits; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 31 January 1992 at column *697*.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

University College, Teesside

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many places will be available for students at the new University college in Teesside when it opens in September.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I understand from the university of Durham and Teesside polytechnic, the institutions managing the admissions to the college, that about 240 places will be available for students in the next academic year, increasing to 1,000 within five years.

Speech Therapy

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what money has been allocated to local education authorities to enable them to fulfil their duty in relation to children who have a statemented need for speech therapy.

Mr. Fallon: The local authority grant settlement for English local education authorities for 1992-93 took account of the broad range of pressures facing them and the increase of 7·1 per cent. should enable them to meet all the duties placed upon them in respect of pupils whose statements of special educational needs specify speech therapy as special educational provision.

Warwickshire

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he or his officials will meet senior education officers of Warwickshire to discuss the educational situation in that county.

Mr. Fallon: Officials at the Department are always ready to meet officers of Warwickshire education authority to discuss issues of concern to them.

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the standard of education and the maintenance of school infrastructure in Warwickshire.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend does not make assessments of the quality of education, or of the standards of school maintenance, in any particular education authority area. Statistics on levels of achievement in public examinations in different local education authorities are, however, kept by the Department and are publicly available. Reports by Her Majesty's inspectorate on individual schools are also published. The Education (Schools) Bill currently before Parliament will ensure that all schools in Warwickshire are regularly inspected on a four-year cycle with published reports of each inspection.

Special Needs

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the amount allocated to each local education authority for expenditure on special educational needs provision for each year since 1985, at constant prices.

Mr. Fallon: The schools component of standard spending assessments—SSAs—does not separately identify an element for special educational needs. However it does include an allowance, equivalent to about 20 per cent. of standard spending for schools, for the additional cost of educating pupils in areas of relative deprivation which is distributed according to an index of additional educational needs. Authorities are not bound by SSAs, but are free to make their own decisions about total spending on education and the distribution of funding between the schools sectors. The amount of spending on special educational needs provision within mainstream schools with delegated budgets is a matter for the governors of those schools.

Pupil Testing

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing for each local authority in England the proportion of its primary schools, and relevant age of pupils, which were included in its return to his Department and his aggregate results of the 1991 key stage 1 tests.

Mr. Eggar: A table showing for each local authority in England the proportion of primary schools used to compile the aggregate results of the 1991 key stage 1 tests, published on 19 December, was provided in a written answer to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on 15 January, *Official Report*, columns *580-82*.

The following table shows what proportion of the total cohort of pupils eligible for testing in each LEA is

represented by the pupils tested in these schools. There is no information about the precise distribution of the ages of pupils tested in each LEA, although all pupils tested completed key stage 1 of the national curriculum in the core subjects in the 1990-91 school year.

Proportion of 7 year old pupils from maintained schools processed for the purposes of publication of 19 December Report

	Percentage of pupils in KS1 results
Camden	94
Greenwich	74
Hackney	100
Hammersmith and Fulham	100
Islington	62
Kensington and Chelsea	100
Lewisham	90
Southwark	55
Wandsworth	85
Westminster	96
Barking and Dagenham	100
Barnet	91
Bexley	100
Brent	91
Bromley	97
Croydon	100
Ealing	72
Enfield	100
Haringey	100
Harrow	92
Havering	100
Hillingdon	78
Hounslow	49
Kingston upon Thames	100
Merton	100
Newham	46
Redbridge	95
Richmond upon Thames	86
Sutton	100
Waltham Forest	94
Birmingham	72
Coventry	100
Dudley	98
Sandwell	93
Solihull	99
Walsall	100
Wolverhampton	96
Knowsley	91
Liverpool	67
St. Helens	94
Sefton	98
Wirral	97
Bolton	68
Bury	100
Manchester	97
Oldham	86
Rochdale	94
Salford	63
Stockport	100
Tameside	99
Trafford	94
Wigan	73
Barnsley	93
Doncaster	87
Rotherham	97
Sheffield	87
Bradford	99
Calderdale	100
Kirklees	59
Leeds	96
Wakefield	100
Gateshead	97
Newcastle upon Tyne	96
North Tyneside	74
South Tyneside	96
Sunderland	98
Avon	100
Bedfordshire	89
Berkshire	99
Buckinghamshire	56
Cambridgeshire	98
Cheshire	88
Cleveland	100
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	99
Cumbria	93
Derbyshire	88
Devon	99
Dorset	89
Durham	91
East Sussex	62
Essex	100
Gloucestershire	93
Hampshire	78
Hereford and Worcester	99
Hertfordshire	93
Humberside	98
Isle of Wight	84
Kent	94
Lancashire	90
Leicestershire	85
Lincolnshire	100
Norfolk	60
North Yorkshire	100
Northamptonshire	100
Northumberland	100
Nottinghamshire	89
Oxfordshire	72
Shropshire	96
Somerset	95
Staffordshire	93
Suffolk	96
Surrey	97
Warwickshire	97
West Sussex	99
Wiltshire	92
Total England	89

Music

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consideration he gave to the curriculum requirements for music in Wales and Scotland when drawing up his plans for England.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend based his draft order for music in the national curriculum for pupils aged five to 14 on the advice of the National Curriculum Council, the statutory body which advises him on curriculum matters in respect of schools in England. The music curriculum for schools in Wales and Scotland is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland in the light of advice from their respective curriculum councils.

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the impact his proposed curriculum requirements for teaching music in England will have on the structure of the GCSE; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The draft order on the music curriculum which is currently out for consultation covers five to 14-year-olds only. The implications of the final order for GCSEs in music will be considered by the School Assessment and Examinations Council, in consultation

with the National Curriculum Council, when they come to revise the criteria for new GCSE syllabuses for first examination in 1996.

Research Expenditure

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the current level of research expenditure for the Universities Funding Council; and what is the projected expenditure for the next three years.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Universities Funding Council allocated £680 million on research-based criteria to universities in academic year 1991-92. This sum was not hypothecated for research. The council has allowed each institution to determine its own spending on teaching and research within the aggregate funds available to it from all sources. The level of funding is determined on an annual basis. The UFC's allocation for 1992-93 announced today represents an underlying increase of over 11 per cent. above the level for 1991-92.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the budget for research of the Universities Funding Council and its predecessor body in real and constant price terms since 1979.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Neither the Universities Funding Council—UFC—nor its predecessor, the University Grants Committee—UGC—has hypothecated funding for research. Each institution has been free to determine its own spending on teaching and research within the aggregate funds available to it from all sources. Estimates of UFC-funded spending on research are set out in the "Annual Review of Government Funded Research and Development", copies of which are in the Library. Estimated spending on scientific research funded by the UGC and UFC respectively increased by 9 per cent in real terms between 1979-80 and 1989-90.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the budget in real and constant price terms of each of the research councils since 1979.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Details of the grants in aid to the research councils since 1979-80 from this Department, in both cash terms and at 1992-93 prices are as follows.

£ million

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*
AFRC—cash	29·5	37·5	42·0	43·6	45·8	46·7	52·7
1992-93 prices	71·7	77·0	78·6	76·2	76·5	74·3	79·5
ESRC—cash	16·8	20·2	20·7	20·7	22·9	22·0	23·6
1992-93 prices	40·8	41·5	38·8	36·2	38·3	35·0	35·6
MRC—cash	57·2	72·9	101·5	107·5	113·7	117·2	122·3
1992-93 prices	130·1	149·7	190·1	187·9	189·9	186·5	184·4
NERC—cash	36·6	46·7	54·3	58·0	61·6	65·3	67·9
1992-93 prices	88·9	95·9	101·7	101·4	102·9	103·9	102·4
SERC—cash	175·6	201·4	216·8	234·4	254·3	278·8	298·4
1992-93 prices	426·7	413·5	405·9	409·7	424·8	443·6	449·9

£ million

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
AFRC—cash	57·1	54·9	61·1	74·3	88·4	95·6	101·6
1992-93 prices	83·4	76·0	78·9	90·1	98·9	99·9	101·6
ESRC—cash	23·8	24·8	27·0	31·5	36·6	35·6	40·7
1992-93 prices	34·7	34·3	34·9	38·2	40·9	37·2	40·7
MRC—cash	128·3	139·8	149·6	176·3	185·7	202·9	218·8
1992-93 prices	187·3	193·5	193·2	213·9	207·7	212·0	218·8
NERC—cash	70·3	73·3	91·9	115·0	135·2	123·7	126·8
1992-93 prices	102·6	101·5	118·7	139·4	151·2	129·3	126·8
SERC—cash	316·2	357·5	367·6	406·2	440·8	456·4	494·9
1992-93 prices	461·6	494·9	474·8	492·7	492·8	477·0	494·9

Note:

The 1992-93 figures were announced to the House on 16 December 1991 (*Official Report*, columns *33-35*). They exclude the amounts in respect of dual support transfers totalling £48 million.

In addition to the grant in aid from this Department, the councils also receive substantial income from other sources.

Undergraduates

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many full-time undergraduates there were at British universities in each year since 1979.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The information is given in the table.

Great Britain—Full-time undergraduate students

	Number
1979	245,093
1980	251,154
1981	253,371
1982	250,024
1983	244,249
1984	241,688
1985	242,922
1986	246,430
1987	250,710
1988	260,684
1989	275,320
1990	289,069

Source: Universities Statistical Record.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will state the allocation among local education authorities of the extra funding for teachers' pay which was recently announced;

(2) what is the projected cost of the teachers' pay award in each local education authority; and what is the cost above the standard cost uplift implied by the revenue support grant settlement.

Mr. Fallon: The Government's proposal to implement the recommendations of the school teachers review body will add an estimated 7·8 per cent. to the teachers' pay bill of local education authorities in England and Wales in 1992-93. The pay bill of LEAs in inner and outer London and some authorities in the south-east will go up by slightly more than the average because of the additional cost of the review body's recommendations on non-discretionary London allowances. In order to help local authorities to cover the cost of the award the Government propose to pay additional grant to authorities in England and Wales totalling £60 million. The £60 million broadly represents the difference between the cost of an award consistent with the overall uplift in education standard spending allowed in the 1992-93 RSG settlements for England and Wales—7·2 per cent.—and the actual cost of the award—7·8 per cent. England's share of the £60 million is £56·5 million. The Government propose that, subject to the House of Commons approval, the additional grant in England should be distributed to local education authorities on the basis of the schools elements of their standard spending assessments. Illustrative allocations to individual LEAs on this basis are set out in the following table. Distribution of the Welsh share of £3·5 million is a matter for the Secretary of State for Wales.

Table showing the distribution of additional grant for each local education authority in England in £s

Local authority	*Additional grant*
GREATER LONDON	
City of London	734
Camden	191,824
Greenwich	340,194
Hackney	344,129
Hammersmith and Fulham	166,063
Islington	255,946
Kensington and Chelsea	106,766
Lambeth	400,767
Lewisham	344,808
Southwark	337,366
Tower Hamlets	388,635
Wandsworth	283,150
Westminster	152,476
Barking and Dagenham	196,396
Barnet	345,836
Bexley	275,540
Brent	394,356
Bromley	302,405
Croydon	383,654
Ealing	391,396
Enfield	350,949
Haringey	304,639
Harrow	227,177
Havering	279,549
Hillingdon	274,867
Hounslow	279,894
Kingston upon Thames	140,044
Merton	177,791
Newham	405,011
Redbridge	287,167
Richmond upon Thames	120,937
Sutton	192,471
Waltham Forest	321,977
Greater Manchester	
Bolton	332,815
Bury	187,135
Manchester	624,614
Oldham	297,607
Rochdale	265,175
Salford	267,431
Stockport	307,183
Tameside	263,627
Trafford	238,630
Wigan	351,479
Merseyside	
Knowsley	243,683
Liverpool	667,301
Sefton	336,079
St. Helens	224,426
Wirral	428,119
South Yorkshire	
Barnsley	241,839
Doncaster	380,746
Rotherham	320,063
Sheffield	527,881
Tyne and Wear	
Gateshead	230,089
Newcastle upon Tyne	309,228
North Tyneside	231,081
South Tyneside	178,571
Sunderland	360,732
West Midlands	
Birmingham	1,519,457
Coventry	378,100
Dudley	324,641
Sandwell	379,363
Solihull	224,404
Walsall	336,406
Wolverhampton	340,690
West Yorkshire	
Bradford	716,003
Calderdale	242,797
Kirklees	486,771
Leeds	811,248
Wakefield	354,339
All Purpose Authority	
Isles of Scilly	4,169

Local authority	Additional grant
Shire Counties	
Avon	974,079
Bedfordshire	703,722
Berkshire	886,505
Buckinghamshire	818,998
Cambridgeshire	755,620
Cheshire	1,113,732
Cleveland	792,026
Cornwall	530,969
Cumbria	547,589
Derbyshire	1,007,005
Devon	1,043,418
Dorset	610,464
Durham	698,966
East Sussex	670,182
Essex	1,821,532
Gloucestershire	568,408
Hampshire	1,707,874
Hereford and Worcester	745,915
Hertfordshire	1,155,985
Humberside	1,075,491
Isle of Wight	144,030
Kent	1,777,478
Lancashire	1,647,414
Leicestershire	1,089,525
Lincolnshire	679,359
Norfolk	807,025
Northamptonshire	703,169
Northumberland	363,015
North Yorkshire	746,045
Nottinghamshire	1,180,252
Oxfordshire	575,576
Shropshire	478,931
Somerset	473,021
Staffordshire	1,164,795
Suffolk	677,208
Surrey	994,128
Warwickshire	524,822
West Sussex	732,529
Wiltshire	614,368

University Lectures

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many Universities Funding Council funded full-time lecturing staff there were in 1979; and how many there were at the most recent count.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Universities derive their funds from a variety of sources including the Universities Funding Council, and before it the University Grants Committee. The total number of wholly-university funded full-time academic staff with teaching and research duties in United Kingdom universities was 33,173 in 1979-80 and 30,644 in 1990-91. UGC and UFC funds respectively will have provided partial support for virtually all of these posts.

DEFENCE

Employment (Scotland)

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many armed forces personnel are currently located in Scotland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: At 1 January 1992, there were a total of 19,845 regular armed forces personnel located in Scotland. These comprised 9,876 Royal Naval personnel, including sea service personnel in home waters with Scottish home ports, 2,978 Army personnel and 6,991 Royal Air Force personnel.

Gulf Trust

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money the public has donated to the Gulf Trust.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I understand from the trustee of the Gulf Trust that almost £2,900,000 has been donated.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answers, *Official Report*, 23 January, column *336*, on what date the Gulf Trust will be formally wound up; and if he will, then provide information, about the amount of money allocated to each of the service benevolent funds.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The deed of trust for the Gulf Trust provides for the winding-up of the trust on 12 February 1993, or such longer period as the trustee may determine after consultation with the Secretary of State for Defence. The amount of money allocated to each of the service benevolent funds donated to the Gulf Trust will be announced when the Gulf Trust is wound up.

Northern Ireland

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number in the forces who, while in service in Northern Ireland, have been *(a)* killed, *(b)* injured, *(c)* so seriously injured as to become disabled, *(d)* have suffered acknowledged mental distress and *(e)* have been discharged from the forces on medical grounds, including both physical and mental causes.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: From August 1969 until 31 December 1991, a total of 434 service men, excluding the Ulster Defence Regiment, were killed while on operations in Northern Ireland. Corresponding figures for injuries have been maintained centrally only from 1979. Since then, a total of 3,838 service men have been injured. Attributable figures for disablement, mental distress, and any consequential medical discharge are not available in the form requested.

UN Conference, Rio de Janeiro

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution his Department is making to Her Majesty's Government's preparations for the United Nations conference on environment and development to be held in Rio de Janeiro in June.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: In common with other Government Departments, the Ministry of Defence is participating, as necessary, in the work required to develop and secure the Government's overall objectives for the UN conference on environment and development.

Cold Weather Monitoring

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the minimum overnight temperatures recorded by the Meteorological Office in degrees

Fahrenheit for cold weather purposes for each of the nights of January 1991 and January 1992 at *(a)* Boulmer weather station and *(b)* Eskdalemuir weather station.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have asked the chief executive of the Meteorological Office to write to the hon. Member.

SCOTLAND

Project 2000

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial allocation has been made to each health board in 1991-92 and is proposed for 1992-93 in respect of Project 2000.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is as follows:

Board	*1991-92 £ million*	*1992-93 £ million*
Argyll and Clyde	1·996	2·235
Ayrshire and Arran	0·495	0·535
Borders	0·534	0·825
Dumfries and Galloway	0·458	0·495
Fife	0·699	1·089
Forth Valley	0·700	0·756
Grampian	1·691	1·828
Greater Glasgow	3·039	3·286
Highland	0·534	0·578
Lanarkshire	1·068	1·155
Lothian	2·124	2·350
Orkney	0·060	0·065
Shetland	0·075	0·080
Tayside	1·627	1·777
Western Isles	0·120	0·130
Total	15·220	17·184

HIV and AIDS

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many non-haemophiliacs in Scotland have contracted HIV infection as a result of national health service transfers of *(a)* blood, *(b)* blood products and *(c)* tissue; and how many of each of these groups became infected before the introduction of screening of donations in October 1985.

Mr. Lang: I refer to the reply that my hon. Friend gave on 6 November 1991, *Official Report*, at column *175*. The total number of reported cases in Scotland as at 31 January was 12.

I have announced today that the special financial help already made to those with haemophilia and HIV in Scotland is to be extended to those infected with HIV as a result of blood transfusion or tissue transfer in the United Kingdom.

Fishing Boats (Repairs)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to ensure that in the application of the 135-day tie-up rule no account will be taken of trips by fishing boats to enable them to undergo repairs.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I can confirm that where a vessel is tied up for repairs this period can count towards the 135 days. Of course, by definition time spent at sea in reaching a yard is not time in port in terms of EC Regulation 3882/91.

Forestry

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on progress achieved in development of United Kingdom forestry policy for the United Nations conference on environment and development to be held in Rio de Janeiro in June.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The United Nations conference on environment and development is expected to agree to a statement of principles for the sustainable management and development of forests, and to give a programme of action to conserve and to expand the world's forests. The Government fully support those initiatives.

Sustainable, multi-purpose forestry is central to the Government's domestic forestry policy which I am sure will fully accord with the agreements that are signed at the United Nations conference.

Cyclists

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cyclists have been *(a)* injured and *(b)* killed in road traffic accidents in each year since 1981.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 14 February 1992]:* The information requested on pedal cycle casualties in Scotland is as follows:

Number of pedal cycle casualties in Scotland

	Killed	*Injured (serious and slight)*
1981	20	1,458
1982	16	1,440
1983	24	1,647
1984	16	1,834
1985	14	1,567
1986	19	1,443
1987	14	1,534
1988	6	1,401
1989	16	1,534
1990	17	1,407

Traffic Cameras

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many automatic cameras have been installed at traffic-light-controlled junctions; and how many more are planned this year.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 14 February 1992]:* One automatic camera has been introduced in Strathclyde region, where it will be used at six traffic-light-controlled junctions. A further six sites have been identified in the region at which an unmanned camera could usefully be installed. It is expected that these sites will come into operation this year.

It is a matter for each chief constable, in consultation with his roads authority, to decide where and to what extent cameras might with advantage be installed in his area.

Police Traffic Operations

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the latest available annual figures of *(a)* police traffic officers and *(b)* civilian staff working in police traffic departments, in each year since 1981.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 14 February 1992]:* Details are given in the table. Information on civilian staff, other than traffic wardens, in traffic divisions is available only from 1988.

As at 31 December	*Police*	*Traffic wardens*	*Other civilians*
1981	1,047	617	[1]
1982	1,040	573	[1]
1983	1,023	559	[1]
1984	900	531	[1]
1985	894	523	[1]
1986	891	546	[1]
1987	899	536	[1]
1988	898	533	182
1989	916	511	169
1990	907	538	169

[1] Information is not available for these years.

Traffic Offences

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many motorists have been *(a)* charged with and *(b)* convicted of (i) reckless driving, (ii) illegal use of bus lanes, (iii) failure to accord precedence at zebra and pedestrian crossings, (iv) speeding (v) failure to stop at a red or amber traffic light and (vi) drunken driving, respectively, in each year since 1981.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 14 February 1992]:* The available information is set out in the table.

Persons proceeded against in Scottish courts

	Reckless driving (i)	*Illegal use of bus-lanes* (ii)	*Contravention of pedestrian crossing regulations* (iii)	*Speeding* (iv)	*Neglect of traffic directions* (v)	*Drunk driving* (vi)
1981	492	N/a	2,492	27,296	4,105	11,460
1982	474	N/a	1,493	20,466	2,953	10,666
1983[1]	575	N/a	1,654	22,210	2,959	11,767
1984	575	N/a	514	5,692	1,609	12,500
1985	537	N/a	409	5,519	935	12,514
1986	658	N/a	434	6,976	812	12,019
1987	590	N/a	407	9,803	1,011	11,438
1988	676	N/a	648	11,218	1,567	10,664
1989	722	N/a	773	13,957	1,655	8,818
1990	783	N/a	909	18,197	2,227	8,830

N/a—Not available.
[1] Since mid 1983 many motor vehicle offences have been dealt with by procurator fiscal fixed penalties rather than by prosecution in the courts.

Persons with charge proved in Scottish courts

	Reckless driving (i)	*Illegal use of bus-lanes* (ii)	*Contravention of pedestrian crossing regulations* (iii)	*Speeding* (iv)	*Neglect of traffic directions* (v)	*Drunk driving* (vi)
1981	457	N/a	2,376	26,467	3,884	11,244
1982	436	N/a	1,451	20,305	2,834	10,429
1983[1]	540	N/a	1,620	22,024	2,857	11,556
1984	528	N/a	483	5,570	1,493	12,213
1985	501	N/a	392	5,432	865	12,269
1986	609	N/a	414	6,882	732	11,780
1987	554	N/a	390	9,695	942	11,199
1988	633	N/a	617	11,057	1,444	10,416
1989	652	N/a	743	13,806	1,525	8,650
1990	694	N/a	865	17,945	2,063	8,583

N/a—Not available.
[1] Since mid 1983 many motor vehicle offences have been dealt with by procurator fiscal fixed penalties rather than by prosecution in the courts.

TRANSPORT

A19, Elwick

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the estimated lane rental cost of the road repairs to the A19 at Elwick, County Durham.

Mr. Chope: The A19 works at Elwick in Cleveland included an improvement scheme and was not considered suitable for lane rental.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the duration of road repairs to the A19 at Elwick, County Durham.

Mr. Chope: There were two separate contracts for the A19 improvement and resurfacing works between Elwick and Wolviston, in Cleveland. They were as follows:

Elwick to Sheraton—12 October 1989 to 19 January 1990
Wolviston to Elwick—14 January to 7 September 1991

Both contracts were completed within the contract period.

Bypasses

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what expenditure is taking place this financial year on the Thornaby and Middleton St. George bypasses.

Mr. Chope: These schemes are the responsibility of the local highway authorities Cleveland county council and Durham county council.

Tees Viaduct

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated cost of repairs to the A19 Tees viaduct carried out during 1991-92.

Mr. Chope: The estimated cost of work on the A19 Tees viaduct in 1991-92 is £2·6 million.

Air Safety

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the chairmen of the Civil Aviation Authority and the airlines about the installation of water sprinklers in the cabins of civil aircraft; what testing of this equipment has taken place; and what assessment has been made of the merits of such equipment with respect to the effects of aircraft fires and the avoidance of long-term risks of physical damage to the passenger.

Mr. McLoughlin: My Department has kept in close touch on this matter with the Civil Aviation Authority, which has the statutory responsibility for matters of aviation safety. An extensive international programme of tests on water sprays has taken place with promising results so far. A further series of tests to study the effect of water sprays on passengers evacuating an aircraft will commence shortly; these will be conducted by the Cranfield Institute of Technology using the Fire Research Station's facility at Cardington and be sponsored by the CAA. The introduction into service of a water spray system would require international agreement and involve extensive consultation with the airline industry.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions are taking place with his European counterparts about introducing common air safety standards on all EC-based airlines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: On 16 December 1991 the EC Council of Transport Ministers adopted Regulation (EEC) No. 3922-91 on the harmonisation of technical requirements and administrative procedures in the field of civil aviation. This will ensure common safety and technical standards for EC aviation.

The United Kingdom continues to play a significant part in the work of the European Joint Aviation Authorities which is drawing up further safety standards with a view to their being adopted by the EC under the harmonization regulation.

East London River Crossing

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many residential properties not physically affected by the east London river crossing have so far been purchased by his Department on compassionate grounds.

Mr. Chope: Four properties have been purchased by the Department on the ground that conditions would be intolerable during construction of the scheme. The Department has agreed to buy one further property on those grounds, but the purchase has not yet been completed. All these purchases were agreed before the Secretary of State's powers of purchase were extended by the Planning and Compensation Act 1991. I announced the new guidelines which will be applied to such purchases in an answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) on 21 November 1991, *Official Report*, column *237*.

M1/M62 Link

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions his Department have had with Wakefield metropolitan district council and local parish or community councils within the Wakefield metropolitan distrtict with regard to the route of the proposed M1/M62 link road.

Mr. Chope: No formal discussions have been held because the proposed scheme is at an early stage of development. We are about to consult representative bodies and the public about possible alternative routes.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce the proposed route for the M1/M62 motorway link.

Mr. Chope: Public consultation into the options for a proposed link between the M1 south west of Wakefield and the M62 east of Huddersfield will start on 27 February 1992. It is only after the responses from the public and representative bodies are fully assessed that we will be able to make an announcement about a preferred route.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Official Secrets

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at what level and within which public bodies in Northern Ireland members are required to comply with official secrets regulations.

Dr. Mawhinney: An offence under the Official Secrets Act 1989 may be committed by any person coming into possession of information of a class covered by that Act.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will call for a report from the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary as to what proportion of the clear-up rate for crime in his area in 1990-91 is accounted for by voluntary admissions by convicted criminals; how many detectives are employed to obtain these admissions; and when the practice ceased.

Dr. Mawhinney: Crimes in Northern Ireland are considered statistically cleared only when a charge has been preferred or a summons issued in relation to a specific offence.

Voluntary admissions by convicted criminals do not by themselves affect the clear up rate for crime. However, they are often received by detectives in the normal course of their investigations. No detectives are deployed solely to obtain such admissions.

Electoral Registers

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons were on the electoral registers published *(a)* in February 1983 and *(b)* February 1992 for each parliamentary constituency in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

Register published in February 1983

Parliamentary constituency	*Number*
Belfast East	74,031
Belfast North	61,826
Belfast South	66,326
Belfast West	57,145
North Antrim	106,131
South Antrim	133,544
Armagh	96,550
North Down	105,942
South Down	95,220
Londonderry	102,635
Mid Ulster	86,104
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	75,731
TOTAL	1,061,185

Register published in February 1992

Constituency	*Number*
Belfast East	53,375
Belfast North	55,587
Belfast South	52,556
Belfast West	55,280
East Antrim	63,739
East Londonderry	76,912
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	71,472
Foyle	75,970
Lagan Valley	73,688
Mid Ulster	70,410
Newry and Armagh	68,716
North Antrim	70,217
North Down	69,604
Strangford	69,855
South Antrim	68,292
South Down	77,371
Upper Bann	68,422
TOTAL	1,141,466

Note: The parliamentary constituencies (Northern Ireland) Order, 1982, altered the number, names and boundaries of Parliamentary Constituencies in Northern Ireland, and came into effect at the 1983 general election (June).

WALES

Inward Investment

10. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the current level of inward investment to date in 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: 1991 was a record year with 183 projects promising over 17,000 new or safeguarded jobs and £860 million capital investment.

Receivership

14. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of companies that went into receivership in Wales between 1979 and 1983, between 1983 and 1989 and in 1990 and 1991.

Mr. David Hunt: None. There are no such records.

Mortgage Repossessions

15. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has concerning the number of mortgage repossessions in Wales during 1991.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: There was a significant and very welcome reduction in the number of repossession actions initiated in the last quarter of 1991. As the impact of the package of measures agreed with mortgage lenders in December begins to take effect, the level of repossessions will continue to fall.

Tourism

16. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on tourism in Wales in 1991.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Although complete figures are not yet available the Wales tourist board expect that, despite a difficult year, tourism in Wales in 1991 will have maintained the impressive levels reached in 1990. Well-targeted investment in the Welsh tourist industry has taken place through a variety of schemes and very careful attention has been give to good quality customer care. My right hon. Friend was very pleased to launch the welcome host training initiative being run by the Wales Tourist board in conjunction with the Welsh training and enterprise councils.

I am confident that the tourist industry in Wales will go from strength to strength and in particular I look forward to the national garden festival which will be held at Ebbw Vale this year.

Health Service Staff

17. **Mr. Grist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of *(a)* physiotherapists, *(b)* occupational therapists, *(c)* speech therapists and *(d)* community psychiatric nurses in Wales in 1979 and at the latest available date.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is as follows:

Staff in post as at 30 September

Whole-time equivalents

	1979	*1991*
(a) Physiotherapists	354	650
(b) Occupational therapists	122	352
(c) Speech therapists	65	154

(d) Community psychiatric nurses: Complete information is not held centrally

EC Regional Policies

18. **Mr. Denzil Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next intends to meet EC Commissioner Millan to discuss the impact of EC regional policies on the economy of Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I hope to meet Commissioner Millan on 20 February when I visit Brussels to open the Wales European centre.

Local Government Finance

19. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met leaders of local authorities in Wales to discuss local government finance.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend chaired a meeting of the Welsh Consultative Council for Local Government Finance on 13 January to discuss the local government revenue settlement for 1992-93.

22. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from Powys county council concerning the rate support grant settlement for 1992-93.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend has not yet received any representations directly from Powys county council on the settlement for the coming year.

Labour Statistics

20. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what number of persons are now registered unemployed in Wales; and what was the number registered as unemployed in Wales in February 1979.

Mr. David Hunt: In January 1992, the seasonally adjusted unemployment figure for Wales was 123,600. The comparable figure for February 1979 was 70,500.

25. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state the number of male unemployed in Newport, Gwent and Wales at the latest available date.

Mr. David Hunt: In January 1992, there were 5,712, 16,063 and 101,149 unemployed male claimants in the Newport district, Gwent and Wales respectively.

Standard Spending Assessments

21. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to alter the standard spending assessment criteria for counties in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The distribution formulae on which county authority's SSAs for 1992-93 are based have been agreed with the Assembly of Welsh Counties and ratified by the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance. The formulae for 1993-94 will be determined in the same way.

Hospitals (South Glamorgan)

23. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to meet the chairman of South Glamorgan health authority concerning hospital provision within the county.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so at present.

Recession

24. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met local authority leaders in Wales to discuss the impact of the recession and job losses on their communities.

Mr. David Hunt: I regularly meet local authority leaders and discuss a wide range of issues with them.

Water Charges

26. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will arrange to meet the chairman of Welsh Water plc to discuss the basis of water charging in Wales after the introduction of a new house value system for the purposes of the proposed council tax; and if he will consider in that context the need for changes in legislation to enable the water company to make rebates to single person households or those on low incomes.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: No. Under section 142 of the Water Industry Act 1991 it is for the water undertaker to determine how charges are calculated. Water charges pay for the provision of a service. It is for the social security system to provide allowances for general living expenses to those in need.

Music Targets

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales why he decided to adopt three attainment targets for music in the national curriculum for Wales as published on 3 February; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The proposals for music in the national curriculum, including the proposals for three attainment targets, were issued for consultation in August last year. The consultation period ended on 1 November. The Curriculum Council for Wales, which has statutory responsibility for advising the Secretary of State on curriculum matters, and the majority of respondents in Wales endorsed a structure which included three attainments targets. The order will also provide opportunities for pupils in Wales to benefit from the Welsh musical heritage as well as other sources.

Deprivation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state the basis on which resources of the rural capital projects initiative will be distributed within Wales; whether it will be geared to the indices of the Welsh deprivation table; and what consideration he will give in this allocation of these funds to those areas, identified as qualifying in terms of deprivation, which have, over recent years, not attracted significant investment under the urban aid programme.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The main objective of the rural initiative competition is to identify those projects likely to be of most benefit to rural communities. Each application is considered on its individual merits and careful account is taken of the views of local authorities and the relevant agencies. The allocation of funds is not based on the ward index of deprivation, which was constructed for a different purpose.

This is a new initiative which, assuming that good quality projects are submitted, will benefit rural communities throughout the Principality.

Animal Carcases

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the disposal of farm animal carcases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Occasional correspondence on the subject of the disposal of farm animal carcases has been received.

Intensive Poultry Units

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines are issued to local authority planning departments regarding the development of intensive poultry units; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Advice on planning controls over livestock units its given in planning policy guidance note No. 7 "The Countryside and the Rural Economy"—annex B, paragraphs B 3-1 to B 3-6—issued in January this year.

Agriculture

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what effect his Department estimates the present proposals for a GATT settlement will have upon the agricultural industry in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The Council of the European Communities has instructed the Commission to negotiate improvements in the draft text prepared by the GATT director general, Mr. Dunkel. It has noted that a final assessment will be possible only after such negotiations have taken place.

Dairy Producers

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many dairy producers have left the industry in Wales during the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Information is not available in the form requested. However, the number of milk producers in Wales in 1981 and 1991 was as follows:

Milk Producers (a)

	Number
(b) 1981	7,566
(c) 1991	5,539

(a) From the register maintained under the Milk and Dairies (General) Regulations 1959
(b) Figures at December
(c) Figures at September

This takes account of both new entrants and producers leaving the dairy industry.

Trunk Roads

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent per mile on trunk roads in each of the Welsh counties during the last year for which figures are available; what were the corresponding figures for the previous 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information is as follows:

Central Government capital and current expenditure on trunk roads and motorways

£'000 per mile

Year	*Clwyd*	*Dyfed*	*Gwent*	*Gwynedd*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*Powys*	*South Glamorgan*	*West Glamorgan*
1981-82	199	85	262	38	125	28	168	139
1982-83	363	63	58	113	170	21	139	175
1983-84	434	86	46	111	402	21	226	136
1984-85	268	56	52	71	343	20	194	71
1985-86	217	54	131	76	203	22	97	93
1986-87	222	86	95	129	168	20	146	73
1987-88	156	72	63	303	151	17	177	123
1988-89	237	36	63	386	139	20	211	260
1989-90	191	73	80	306	104	35	57	132
1990-91	172	97	96	349	80	52	385	659

Note: 1981-82 is the earliest year and 1990-91 the latest year for which information is available.

Road Improvements, Fishguard

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will hold a public inquiry into the proposed road improvement schemes to be carried out in Fishguard; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have yet to publish my proposals in the form of draft orders for the diversion at Lower Town and a route 6 western bypass of Fishguard. A decision to hold a public inquiry for either will be taken in the light of any objections received following publication of my proposals.

Business Rates

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimates he has for the cost of allowing businesses in Wales to remain eligible for transitional relief from the uniform business rate although they move premises in 1992-93; and what would be the additional cost of returning eligibility for transitional relief in 1992-93 to those businesses who moved premises in 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. David Hunt: Transitional relief does not attach to businesses but to the premises they occupy. The additional cost of returning transitional protection to properties where there was a change of occupier in 1990-91 or 1991-92 would be around £1 million. No estimate is possible for 1992-93.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the cost of increasing the thresholds at which Welsh businesses are eligible for the small business category of uniform business rate transitional relief, from a rateable value of £10,000 to £15,000 in the financial year 1992-93.

Mr. David Hunt: I estimate that the cost of increasing the small property threshold for uniform business rate transitional relief to £15,000 would be about £5 million in 1992-93.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has of the cost of cancelling the announced increase in the national non-domestic rate poundage for Wales in 1992-93; and what would be the cost of reducing that increase to *(a)* 3 per cent., *(b)* 2 per cent., and *(c)* 1 per cent.

Mr. David Hunt: I estimate the cost of underindexing the national non-domestic rate poundage for Wales in 1992-93 would be approximately £5 million for each one percentage point. Cancelling the increase of just over 4 per cent. on the 1991-92 multiplier would cost approximately £20 million.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the cost in 1992-93 of extending the transitional relief scheme for the uniform business rate in Wales so that all losses are suspended in the coming financial year, while all gains continue to be phased in according to the transitional arrangements.

Mr. David Hunt: I estimate that the cost of reducing the real terms transitional limits to 0 per cent. in 1992-93 would be around £15 million.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the cost of lowering the maximum permissible annual increase in uniform business rate bills for Welsh businesses in *(a)* nominal and *(b)* real terms (i) for small businesses from 15 per cent. to 10 per cent. and (ii) for larger businesses, from 20 per cent. to 15 per cent. in 1992-93.

Mr. David Hunt: The cost of lowering the maximum annual transition increase by 5 per cent. for (i) small businesses and (ii) larger businesses whether in nominal or real terms, would be about £5 million in each case, £10 million in total.

Monmouth

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many inward investment projects have been attracted to Monmouth travel-to-work area since 1979; and if he will give details of those projects;

(2) what proposals he has to attract business investment and quality jobs to the Monmouth travel-to-work area.

Mr. David Hunt: Comprehensive records are not available from 1979.

Wales has, however, secured record levels of inward investment in recent years and continuing efforts are made to draw to the attention of investors the advantages of locations throughout Wales. This includes targeted campaigns such as IT Wales and the financial services initiative. A range of assistance and considerable expert advice to aid industrial development is available from the Welsh Office and the Welsh Development Agency and tourism developments are encouraged by schemes operated by the Wales tourist board.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what delegation he has agreed to meet concerning the application for assisted area status for the Monmouth travel-to-work area;

(2) when he proposes to meet a delegation on behalf of Monmouth borough council, Monmouth town council, Gwent county council and Monmouth chamber of commerce concerning the application for assisted area status for the Monmouth travel-to-work area;

(3) when he next proposes to meet representatives of the business community in Monmouth to discuss business investment.

Mr. David Hunt: I have agreed to meet a deputation to discuss business investment in the area, including assisted area status, but the details have not yet been finalised.

Assisted Area Status

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the travel-to-work areas in south Wales which do not have assisted area status.

Mr. David Hunt: Taking the area south of that covered by the Development Board of Rural Wales, there are three travel-to-work areas which are not assisted areas. These are Carmarthen, Llandeilo and Monmouth.

Council House Sales

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the levels of debt that each district authority in Wales is required to redeem from capital receipts from the sale of council houses.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The table sets out for each authority the amount required to be set aside for credit liabilities from the sale of council houses up to 31 March 1991.

Reserved part of receipts from council house sales up to 31 March 1991[1]

	£000
Alyn and Deeside	3,813
Colwyn	2,324
Delyn	1,332
Glyndwr	2,230
Rhuddlan	2,859
Wrexham Maelor	10,904
Carmarthen	4,318
Ceredigion	5,372
Dinefwr	1,267
Llanelli	2,336
Preseli Pembs	5,674
South Pembrokeshire	4,582
Blaenau Gwent	6,223
Islwyn	6,894
Monmouth	4,362
Newport	10,453
Torfaen	6,395
Aberconwy	5,317
Arfon	4,293
Dwyfor	834
Meirionnydd	1,527
Ynys Mon	4,966
Cynon Valley	2,744
Merthyr Tydfil	3,185
Ogwr	6,724
Rhondda	621
Rhymney Valley	7,056
Taff-Ely	8,174
Brecknock	6,346
Montgomeryshire	7,584
Radnorshire	3,160
Cardiff	7,028
Vale of Glamorgan	18,922
Port Talbot	4,400
Lliw Valley	5,083
Neath	3,038
Swansea	4,838
Total Wales	187,178

[1] Including the reserved part of (i) cash backed accumulated receipts at midnight 31 March 1990 and (ii) in-year receipts 1990-91.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has as to whether local authorities in Wales are investing their permitted level of capital receipts from the sale of council houses in new housing.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of 1990-91 capital receipts from the sale of council houses each local authority in Wales has actually spent on housing.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Authorities may apply the usable part of capital receipts to any capital purpose. The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many houses he estimates could be constructed in each local authority in Wales if those local authorities were permitted to spend *(a)* 50 per cent., *(b)* 75 per cent. and *(c)* 100 per cent. of their 1990-91 capital receipts from the sale of council houses.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It is not possible to make such estimates in view of factor cost variations and other considerations, including those related to sound financial and resource management.

Further Education

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make provision for special transitional arrangements, pending the setting up of the Further Education Funding Council for Wales, to enable suitable premises to be found for further education students and staff currently located at the Llandaf and Colchester avenue campuses of the Cardiff institute of higher education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State has agreed to meet a deputation from South Glamorgan county council, South Glamorgan TEC and the Construction Industry training board to discuss the local authority's proposals.

Listed Buildings

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment has been made by CADW of listed buildings in Monmouth.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has a duty to compile a list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest for the guidance of local planning authorities. A detailed survey of Monmouth was undertaken in 1974 which identified 169 buildings. Since then, in response to inquiries made to the Department a further six buildings have been added to the statutory list.

Health Service

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the amount allocated by each district health authority in Wales to the extra-contractual budget.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information relating to the reserves which each health authority in Wales has set aside in 1991-92 for extra contractual referrals is as follows:

Budget for extra contractual referrals 1991-92

District health authority	*£ million*
Clwyd	1·2
East Dyfed	1·2
Gwent	1·4
Gwynedd	1·2
Mid Glamorgan	1·3
Pembrokeshire	0·6
Powys	0·5
South Glamorgan	1·6
West Glamorgan	1·6

Source: Health authorities in Wales.

Sites of Archaeological Significance

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the duties of local authority planning departments with regard to development on sites of archaeological significance.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The desirability of preserving archaeological remains is a material consideration which local planning authorities are obliged to consider. To assist authorities we have made available guidance: planning policy guidance note 16 (Wales) archaeology and planning, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding Monmouth's archaeological significance; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: No general representations have been received about the archaeological significance of Monmouth although I, and the Department, fully appreciate the importance of the town's archaeology.

Shared Ownership Accommodation

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of shared ownership houses and flats due to be completed by local authorities and housing associations in Wales in the current financial year.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information about the intended tenure of local authority dwellings under construction is not available centrally. A total of 270 shared ownership dwellings are expected to be completed by housing associations in Wales in 1991-92. In addition it is estimated that 602 dwellings for flexible tenure for the elderly will be completed, many of which could be expected to be occupied on a shared equity basis.

Chippenham Mead, Monmouth

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding proposed development of Chippenham Mead in Monmouth.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend has received four letters and a petition containing over 300 signatures, objecting to two proposed developments on, or adjacent to, Chippenham Mead village green, and asking for the two applications for planning permission to be called-in for his determination. These planning applications are for the proposed continuation of use of part of the village green for temporary periods for caravan rallies

and associated parking of motor vehicles and the proposed construction of a supermarket and customer car park on Monnow street, Monmouth. These call-in requests are being considered and decisions on them will be reached shortly.

My right hon. Friend is also considering a request from Monmouth borough council for his consent under the Commons Act 1899 to set aside part of the village green for the temporary parking of vehicles. So far he has received 52 letters on the proposals, 48 of which are objections.

Building Costs

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current average cost of building one unit of social housing in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The average cost of a housing association unit inclusive of private sector funding at tender approval stage this financial year, to mid-January, is £41,000.

ENVIRONMENT

Derelict Land Grant

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much has been spent in derelict land grant in Darlington since 1979; and how many acres have been restored as a result.

Mr. Yeo: Records for derelict land grant—DLG—payments towards reclamation schemes in Darlington, and the amount of land reclaimed, are not available for the full period covered by the question. However the expenditure incurred by Darlington borough council on DLG-supported reclamation, and the figures for the amount of land reclaimed are as follows:

Darlington borough council: derelict land grant expenditure and land reclaimed

	£	Acres
1979-80	n/a	n/a
1980-81	213,864	n/a
1981-82	187,611	n/a
1982-83	582,334	n/a
1983-84	319,094	12·97
1984-85	254,514	13·91
1985-86	589,788	6·79
1986-87	536,772	24·21
1987-88	269,442	1·24
1988-89	284,697	41·74
1989-90	563,164	18·43
1990-91	529,567	14·89
Total	4,330,847	134·17

A further £32,697 has been spent by Durham county council in reclaiming 10·03 acres of land in Darlington.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is *(a)* the total acreage of national parks in England and *(b)* the current total acreage of designated environmentally sensitive areas in England; and what will be the total acreage of environmentally sensitive areas in England when the further designations, recently announced, have been fully implemented.

Mr. Baldry: The seven national parks in England cover 2,348,000 acres. The 10 existing ESAs in England cover some 956,300 acres. The total acreage of all ESAs is expected to be around 2,870,000 acres when the further designations, recently announced, have been fully implemented.

Local Government Finance

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the 1992-93 precept per community charge payer proposed by Tadley town council in the borough of Basingstoke;

(2) how many parish or town councils have proposed a precept of £29·88 or more per community charge payer for 1992-93.

Mr. Portillo: This information is not available to me.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will state the basis of the sum of £2,469,200,000 ascribed to debt charges in annex B of the Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) (No. 2) Report (England) H.C. 190.91/92 and the estimated total of all relevant local authorities receiving grant consequent to the report;

(2) if he will state the basis on which he determined the formulae concerning the global sum and distribution of standard spending assessments, respectively for repayment of and interest on approved capital expenditure by local authorities, together with references to documents where such statements and formulae were publicly available.

Mr. Key: Total standard spending for 1992-93 represents the Government's view of the appropriate amount of revenue spending by local authorities to provide all services. Within that, the total amount allowed for the revenue consequences of capital spending represents the relative priority to be afforded to this type of expenditure, bearing in mind relevant factors such as likely movements in interest rates.

The method of distribution of the SSA element for debt charges is set out in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) Report (No. 2) (England). The basis of this approach is described in the publication by the Department of the Environment "SSAs Background and Underlying Methodology"; copies of both documents are in the Library.

All 366 charging authorities receive revenue support grant.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from representative local authority organisations concerning the difference between the total of the standard spending assessments concerning capital charges and the amount they have, or are liable, to disperse in respect of their authorised borrowing requirements.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced his proposals for the 1992-93 revenue support grant settlement to the House on 26 November 1991. During the consultation period following that announcement representations on the capital financing element of standard spending assessments—SSAs—were received from the Association of Metropolitan Authorities—AMA—and the Association of County Councils. Both associations commented on the

proposed total within SSAs for capital expenditure financed from the revenue account. The AMA also questioned the total available for debt charges and the link with falling interest rates.

Mr. Wells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, when he expects to announce the outcome of the consultation on the local government finance settlement for 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine *[pursuant to his answer, 23 January 1992, c. 277]:* Since the approval of the revenue support grant report, I have formed the view that fresh circumstances affecting the finances of local authorities have arisen. I have today laid before the House the "Additional Grant Report (England) 1992-93", which contains my determination of the total amount of grant to be paid to local authorities in England, and the basis on which it is to be distributed; and I have placed in the vote office copies of a letter and table, showing individual grant entitlements, that is being sent to all local authorities today.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in rank order the SSA per head for the English shire counties for the forthcoming year, and for 1991-92.

Mr. Key: The SSA figures in pounds per adult are as follows for 1991-92 and 1992-93.

SSA per head of adult for English shire counties for 1991-92

Local authority	*1991-92 Total SSA (£ adult)*
Cleveland	964
Bedfordshire	851
Lanchashire	843
Humberside	839
Leicestershire	837
Buckinghamshire	833
Northamptonshire	813
Berkshire	805
Nottinghamshire	802
Kent	802
Durham	794
Shropshire	793
Cornwall	790
Isle of Wight	786
Hertfordshire	783
Essex	778
Cheshire	777
Cumbria	775
Lincolnshire	773
Cambridgeshire	772
Hampshire	763
Somerset	763
Wiltshire	753
Suffolk	752
Staffordshire	750
Avon	745
Derbyshire	743
Gloucestershire	743
Oxfordshire	742
Devon	739
North Yorkshire	739
Hereford and Worcester	737
Northumberland	735
East Sussex	734
Norfolk	729
Warwickshire	728
West Sussex	718
Surrey	699
Dorset	680

SSA per head of adult for English shire counties for 1992-93

Local authority	*1992-93 Total SSA (£ adult)*
Cleveland	1,034
Bedfordshire	940
Buckinghamshire	912
Lancashire	912
Humberside	904
Leicestershire	902
Berkshire	889
Northamptonshire	881
Nottinghamshire	869
Kent	865
Isle of Wight	861
Hertfordshire	851
Durham	847
Essex	844
Shropshire	844
Cambridgeshire	842
Cornwall	840
Cheshire	837
Lincolnshire	830
Hampshire	829
Cumbria	828
Wiltshire	809
Staffordshire	807
Somerset	807
Gloucestershire	804
Suffolk	799
Avon	798
East Sussex	798
Derbyshire	795
Oxfordshire	794
Devon	792
North Yorkshire	789
Northumberland	787
Hereford and Worcester	785
Warwickshire	782
Norfolk	782
West Sussex	777
Surrey	759
Dorset	740

Montreal Protocol

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will press for an emergency meeting of the Montreal protocol convention.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg) on 11 February 1992, *Official Report* column *430*.

Lead Pollution

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to reduce the amount of lead in the environment by reducing the proportion of lead that any product may contain.

Mr. Baldry: The Government's policy is to reduce man's exposure to lead wherever reasonably practicable. To this end, a number of measures have already been taken in the form of reductions in the amount of lead in petrol and encouragement in the use of unleaded petrol. Already in 1992 regulations to restrict the use of certain lead compounds in paints have been laid before Parliament. Further regulations to restrict the use of lead solders are currently being drafted. The Government are also continuing discussions with relevant bodies at both

national and international level with the aim of identifying where additional measures to reduce man's exposure to lead are viable.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sites of special scientific interest are currently designated.

Mr. Baldry: To date there are 3,559 sites of special scientific interest in England designated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Housing, Stockton

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses have been *(a)* constructed and *(b)* repaired using funds from the Housing Corporation in the Stockton, South constituency in the current financial year.

Mr. Yeo: The distribution of resources among local authority areas is a matter for the Housing Corporation. I have, therefore, asked the corporation to reply direct to my hon. Friend with the information he has requested. A copy of the reply will be placed in the Library of the House.

Animal Imports

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he has taken to implement the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species conference resolution 7.13, on welfare checks at the point of importation of all consignments of live animals.

Mr. Baldry: The steps the Government have taken to include requiring exporters of live specimens to transport the specimens in accordance with the International Air Transport Association live animals regulations, and the collection of information on the mortality of birds during transport. Compliance with the IATA regulations will become mandatory throughout the community from 1 January 1993 under EC directive 91/628 on the protection of animals during transport. We shall continue to press for further Community action. We are considering the need for other measures.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are taken to ensure the validity of declarations made by applicants for permits to import live animals to the effect that they have proper facilities for the accommodation of the species they wish to import and that the animals will be properly transported and cared for.

Mr. Baldry: It is an offence knowingly or recklessly to make a false declaration or provide false information for the purposes of obtaining an import permit. In the event of any doubt about the facilities available for accommodating an imported specimen, or the ability of an importer to care for a specimen adequately, the Department would pursue the matter in consultation with its scientific advisers. Follow-up action could, if appropriate, include asking for further details from the applicant or arranging for an inspection of the premises. If we were not satisfied that the appropriate standards were met, we would refuse to issue a permit.

For certain species, the Department asks new traders and those who move premises to supply information about their facilities.

Housing Associations

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much has been spent by housing associations in the Chelmsford parliamentary constituency in each year since 1979; and how many units of housing this has provided.

Mr. Yeo: The distribution of resources among local authority areas is a matter for the Housing Corporation. I have therefore asked the corporation to reply direct to my hon. Friend with the information he has requested. A copy of the reply will be placed in the Library of the House.

Housing, Liverpool

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to visit Liverpool in the near future; and if, on his next visit to the city, he will meet residents of the Norris Green and Dovecot housing estates to discuss housing and environment matters.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend has no plans to visit Liverpool in the near future. I am visiting Merseyside on 26 February and spending some time in Liverpool and Wirral, where I will be speaking at a seminar. Either I or my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State responsible for housing, will be happy to consider a visit to these estates on a future occasion, once the city council has started to develop options for tackling the problems.

Travellers

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the twice-yearly count of gipsy caravans for each year since 1982 in *(a)* England, *(b)* Buckinghamshire, *(c)* south Buckinghamshire and *(d)* Wycombe.

Mr. Yeo: I am placing this information in the Library of the House.

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many gipsy caravans were shown as being in the county of Surrey in each of the twice-yearly counts carried out for his Department by local authorities in each of the past 10 years; and how many of these were in the Boroughs of Woking and Guildford, respectively.

Sir George Young: I am placing this information in the Library of the House.

Business Rates

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he has of *(a)* the yield from national non-domestic rates in England and Wales in (i) 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93, *(b)* the yield from business rates in Scotland in (i) 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93, *(c)* how the revenue between (a)(ii) and (a)(i), and (b)(ii) and (b)(i), respectively, breaks down in terms of the increases in poundage, changes in the commercial property base and changes in the valuations that have occurred.

Mr. Portillo: The estimated amount which I expect to be paid by way of rates and contributions in aid of rates for Crown property in England in respect of 1991-92 and 1992-93 are shown in the table together with the detailed assumptions. These estimates of yield formed the bases of the distributable amount of non-domestic rates for 1992-93 announced by my right hon. Friend on 6 November 1991.

	1991-92 £ million	*1992-93 £ million*
Estimated gross rate yield (aggregate rateable value x multiplier)	13,369	13,923
Additions to Gross rate yield		
Enterprise Zones coming into rating	21	56
Buoyancy between 1991-92 and 1992-93 (new and improved properties net of demolitions etc.)	—	156
Net effect of transitional arrangements	49	35
Reductions to Gross rate yield		
Appeals in 1992-93 (gross of transitional arrangements)	−176	−168
Reliefs, allowance for losses on collection etc.	−1,226	−1,218
Net yield from ratepayers (on an accruals basis, excluding the effect of appeals determined in future years)	12,037	12,784

The arrangements for non-domestic rates in Wales and Scotland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer of cancelling the first monthly instalment of uniform business rate bills for businesses in England and Wales in 1992-93; and what would be the equivalent cost to Scottish local authorities as a whole with respect to business rate bills.

Mr. Portillo: The total amount which would be forgone as a result of cancelling the April 1992 instalment in England would be approximately £1·28 billion. This estimate includes contributions in aid of rates in respect of Crown property. Non-domestic rates contributions in Scotland and Wales are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales respectively.

Local Councils (Survey)

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the survey carried out by the university of Aston business school on the work of parish and town councils.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) on 13 February 1992, *Official Report* columns *572-73*.

Leeds Development Corporation

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out by standard industrial classification the numbers employed in the area covered by the Leeds Development Corporation at its inception, and the latest available figures.

Mr. Key: The information requested is not available. Leeds development corporation does not analyse employment numbers within its areas by standard industrial classification.

Water Companies

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many shareholders there are in the 10 water companies in England and Wales.

Mr. Baldry: The companies themselves would be able to give the latest figures. However 1,096,025 shareholders paid the final instalment for the shares in July last year.

Poll Tax

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to have information in his Department on the level of the poll tax from most local authorities.

Mr. Key: Charging authorities are required to set their budgets for 1992-93 by 11 March and to set their community charges for 1992-93 on or before 1 April. We have asked them to report the community charges within seven days of setting them, or by 2 April 1992 at the latest.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment between which dates he estimates the majority of poll tax bills will be delivered by local authorities.

Mr. Key: An authority must set its community charge by 1 April and issue bills as soon as possible after the charge has been set.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has, at the latest convenient date, as to how much of the outstanding poll tax owed to local authorities is owed by people in receipt of poll tax rebate.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 14 February 1992]:* This information is not available.

Leigh Barton

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many workmen have been involved in the repair work preventing the historic monument Leigh Barton from being opened to the public since 1986, in each of the last five years; and in what crafts there is a shortage of skilled workmen to complete the repairs.

Mr. Yeo: A team of four general craftsmen have been working at Leigh Barton since 1986. There is no shortage of skilled workmen to complete the repairs.

Road System, Leicester

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether a full environmental impact assessment has been carried out for the various suggested alternatives for the Leicester eastern district distributor road.

Mr. Yeo: I am advised that Leicestershire county council as the highway authority responsible is taking environmental considerations into account in examining a

number of alternatives for this road. When the route is finalised the county council, as planning authority, will consider the need for an environmental statement.

Gulf War (Marine Pollution)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make a statement on the effect upon the breeding and feeding grounds for the Penaid shrimp in the Tanajib Manifa embayment system of oil spilled during the Gulf war;

(2) what steps have been taken to restore the ecology for the wader and inter-tidal invertebrates in the Gulf following the Gulf war.

Mr. Baldry: The primary responsibility for such questions rests with other Governments. My reply to the hon. Member of 15 January *Official Report*, column *573*, sets out the contribution that the United Kingdom has made.

Urban Programme

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the level of grant per head of population for Blackburn, Burnley, Knowsley, Liverpool, Manchester, Preston, Rochdale, Salford, Middlesbrough, Birmingham, Coventry, Sandwell, Wolverhampton, Leicester, Nottingham, Bradford and Kingston upon Hull, respectively in the financial years 1980-81, 1983-84, 1986-87 and 1989-90, for the urban programme category of central Government revenue funding of local authorities;

(2) if he will list the level of grant per head of population for each of the standard economic regions and in Greater London in the financial years 1980-81, 1983-84, 1986-87 and 1989-90 for the urban programme category of central Government revenue funding of local authorities;

(3) if he will list the level of grant per head of population for Brent, Greenwich, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, Haringey, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Newham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Wandsworth, respectively in the financial years 1980-81, 1983-84, 1986-87 and 1989-90, for the urban programme category of central Government revenue funding of local authorities.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 7 February 1992]:* The tables provide total capital and revenue outturn figures for the urban programme for 1980-81, 1983-84, 1986-87 and 1989-90.

Separate revenue figures are not readily available before 1988-89.

Urban programme expenditure is targeted on the most deprived inner city areas within the local authorities' boundaries: population figures for these areas are not readily available.

UP outturn by standard economic region and Greater London

£ million

Region	*1980-81*	*1983-84*	*1986-87*	*1989-90*
Northern	22·970	37·900	37·450	40·628
North West[1]	22·930	36·000	37·470	41·296
Merseyside[1]	20·420	29·500	30·500	27·812
West Midlands	21·200	34·800	39·880	42·837
East Midlands	7·240	11·900	10·020	10·212
Yorkshire & Humberside	12·950	20·300	17·500	27·210
South West	—	—	—	2·431
London	55·110	48·100	47·600	43·539

Notes:

[1] These two UP regions form one standard north-west region. None of the other standard regions received UP grant in these years. The number of UP authorities in the standard regions changed during the period covered.

UP outturn by non-London UP authority

£ million

Authority	*1980-81*	*1983-84*	*1986-87*	*1989-90*
Blackburn	0·340	1·600	3·700	4·093
Burnley	—	—	—	1·954
Knowsley	0·150	1·000	3·610	3·575
Liverpool	17·600	25·000	22·590	16·473
Manchester/Salford[1]	17·500	23·500	22·660	19·312
Preston	—	—	—	2·577
Rochdale	0·550	2·100	3·620	3·659
Middlesbrough	2·710	5·600	5·350	5·073
Birmingham	17·300	24·200	25·940	24·478
Coventry	0·140	1·700	3·750	5·031
Sandwell	0·830	3·100	4·540	4·689
Wolverhampton	2·930	5·800	5·650	4·733
Leicester	3·830	6·500	4·710	4·561
Nottingham	3·410	5·400	5·310	4·522
Bradford	3·330	5·900	3·470	4·502
Kingston-upon-Hull	2·620	5·300	4·530	4·544

[1] Partnership authority.

UP outturn by London UP authority

£ million

Authority	*1980-81*	*1983-84*	*1986-87*	*1989-90*
Brent	0·350	1·400	3·800	2·413
Greenwich	—	—	—	0·998
Hackney	[1]15·400	12·500	10·550	4·491
Hammersmith & Fulham	3·330	5·600	4·520	2·871
Haringey	—	—	—	2·252
Islington	[1]—	9·900	9·270	7·782
Kensington & Chelsea	—	—	—	1·720
Lambeth	9·000	10·900	11·320	8·271
Lewisham	—	—	—	1·450
Newham	—	—	—	2·690
Southwark	—	—	—	2·113
Tower Hamlets	0·350	1·300	3·910	3·693
Wandsworth	0·480	1·700	4·230	2·795

Notes:

[1] Combined Hackney/Islington figure.

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, on his visit to Hong Kong in December 1988, the then Secretary of State took part in party political activities in addition to official duties.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 13 February 1992]:* I understand that my right hon. Friend undertook only official duties during his brief visit which came at the end of a visit to China to discuss environmental matters.

Business Rates

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has of the cost of cancelling the increase in the national non-domestic rate poundage for England in 1992-93 which he announced in his answer to the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) of 6 November 1991 *Official Report*, column *158*; and what would be the cost of reducing that increase to *(a)* 3 per cent., *(b)* 2 per cent. and *(c)* 1 per cent.

Mr. Portillo: I estimate that the cost of cancelling the increase of just over 4 per cent. on the 1991-92 uniform

business rate multiplier would be approximately £500 million. Under-indexing would cost approximately £125 million for each percentage point.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the cost of increasing the thresholds at which businesses are elegible for the small business category of uniform business rate transitional relief from a rateable value of £10,000 to £15,000 outside London, and from a rateable value of £15,000 to £25,000 within London for the financial year 1992-93.

Mr. Portillo: I estimate that the cost in England would be about £25 million.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the cost in 1992-93 of extending the transitional relief scheme for the uniform business rate in England so that all losses are suspended in the coming financial year, while all gains continue to be phased in according to the transitional arrangements.

Mr. Portillo: I estimate that the cost of freezing rate increases in real terms, for 1992-93, for ratepayers subject to transitional arrangements would be around £300 million.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has of the cost of lowering the maximum permissible annual increase in uniform business rate bills in *(a)* nominal and *(b)* real terms, (i) for small businesses, from 15 to 10 per cent. and (ii) for larger businesses, from 20 to 15 per cent. in 1992-93.

Mr. Portillo: I estimate that the cost in 1992-93 of confining the maximum annual transitional increase to 10 per cent. for small properties and 15 per cent. for large ones would be about £140 million. The cost of confining the maximum increase to the same limits in real terms would be about £70 million.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 18 February 1992

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Life Sentences

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Attorney-General if he will ask the Law Commission to consider the matter of life stentences; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Law Commission's work on the criminal code will, in time, encompass the whole of the criminal law and will therefore necessarily include all those offences which may attract a life sentence. My right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has, however, no plans to invite the Law Commission to embark upon a separate consideration of that penalty.

Mortgage Repossessions

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Attorney-General how many orders of repossession of property in favour of building societies or other lending institutions were made *(a)* by the Cardiff county court and *(b)* by the Pontypridd magistrates court in 1979, 1990 and 1991.

The Attorney-General: Mortgage possession actions are dealt with in the county court only. The 1979 figures are not available. The total number of mortgage possession actions entered, suspended orders and orders made during 1990 and 1991 in each county court in England and Wales is contained in two lists which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament. These figures do not indicate how many houses have been repossessed through the courts as not all the orders made will have resulted in the issue and execution of warrants of possession. At this stage, the 1991 figures are provisional and, therefore, liable to revision in the future.

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Attorney-General how many orders of repossession of property in favour of building societies or other lending institutions were made by the Swansea county court in 1979, 1990 and 1991.

The Attorney-General: The 1979 figures are not available. The total number of mortgage possession actions entered, suspended orders and orders made during 1990 and 1991 in each county court in England and Wales is contained in two lists which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament. These figures do not indicate how many houses have been repossessed through the courts as not all the orders made will have resulted in the issue and execution of warrants of possession. At this stage, the 1991 figures are provisional and, therefore, liable to revision in the future.

Next Steps

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Attorney-General if he has identified any candidates within his Department for agency status under the next steps initiative.

The Attorney-General: Following a feasibility study, I have selected the Treasury Solicitor's Department's property division as a candidate for executive agency status.

I am confident that a move to agency status will be beneficial, enabling the agency to operate with greater freedom and with more clearly defined responsibilities within an agreed framework of objectives, performance targets, and resources. The move will, I believe, lead to improvements in efficiency and effectiveness.

Detailed discussions on an agency framework document have now been set in hand, and we will carry planning forward with a view to establishing the division as an executive agency on 1 April 1993.

THE ARTS

Items in Lieu of Tax

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Minister for the Arts if there have been any items accepted in lieu of tax or allocated since the announcement was last made on the subject to the House.

Mr. Renton: I am pleased to inform the House that two offers in lieu of tax have been accepted since my announcement on 28 November 1991, *Official Report*, column *579*.

The offer of the painting "Poele de l'Atelier" by Cezanne will satisfy £750,562 tax. It is offered on condition that it be allocated to the national gallery and it has therefore been allocated to that institution.

The offer of eight contemporary paintings will satisfy £108,920 tax. The contemporary paintings are:

'Bomb Store' by David Bomberg
'Self-Portrait, recto and verso' by David Bomberg
'Ghetto Theatre' by David Bomberg
'Women and Goat' by Robert Colquhoun
'Two Figures Monotype' by Robert Colquhoun
'Man Hosing Metal Fish Boxes' by Prunella Clough
'Pears' by William Scott
An untitled work by Roger Hilton

'Bomb Store' by David Bomberg and the Prunella Clough painting have been temporarily allocated to the Tate gallery and the remainder to the Wakefield city art gallery, pending a decision on the collection's permanent allocation.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing, Leicester

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what extra cost Leicester city council is to be required to meet in relation to the cost of removing houses built by the council on the Goodwood road part of the distributor road network.

Mr. Portillo: Leicestershire county council has not yet determined its preferred route for the Leicester eastern district distributor road from the city boundary to the A47. Therefore it is not certain whether houses owned by Leicester city council on Goodwood road would be affected. However if demolition were necessary, the county, and not the city, would be responsible for meeting the costs and those of replacement.

Local Government Finance

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list powers he has to control excessive expenditure by a parish or town council; and if he will exercise them in the case of Tadley town council in the borough of Basingstoke.

Mr. Portillo: We have no such powers. We expect parish and town councils to budget prudently. We have, however, included a provision in the Local Government Finance Bill, currently before Parliament, which would allow my right hon. Friend, by order, to bring parish precepts within the budgets of districts for the purposes of capping.

Ultraviolet Light

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements exist for the monitoring of ultraviolet light in the United Kingdom and for making the data public; and what research is undertaken to relate the data to the environmental and health impacts.

Mr. Baldry: Ultraviolet radiation is monitored continuously in the United Kingdom by the National Radiological Protection Board—NRPB—at three locations—Chilton, Oxfordshire; Leeds; and Glasgow. The data are published annually in NRPB reports. The Department of the Environment is funding improved ultraviolet radiation monitoring methods at Reading university. The results are disseminated as research publications.

The Department of the Environment funds research into the impact of increased ultraviolet radiation on vegetation. The NRPB advises the Department of Health on health effects of ultraviolet light and has established an advisory group which will review new studies and advise on the need for further research.

Council Tax

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 6 December, *Official Report*, columns *235-36*, why he has decided not to publish any analysis of the impact of the council tax using the tax-benefit model; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Modelling the possible impact of the council tax requires a large number of assumptions. Because of this, the results of any such modelling would be subject to wide and unquantifiable margins of error.

City Challenge

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made with the city challenge initiative.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State launched the first round of city challenge in May 1991 and invited 15 local authorities to submit bids for resources for 1992-93. Bids for 11 areas were successful in the competition and, subject to satisfactory implementation of action plans and the availability of resources, each area will be allocated £37·5 million in city challenge resources over five years.

The first of the 11 action plans, for the Sneinton and St Ann's area of Nottingham, was formally approved on 17 February. It is hoped that the remaining plans, for areas of Manchester, Liverpool, Wirral, Middlesbrough, Newcastle, Wolverhampton, Bradford, Lewisham, Tower Hamlets and Dearne Valley, will receive final approval shortly.

My right hon. Friend announced today that for the second round of city challenge, starting in 1993-94, all 57 local authorities currently in the urban programme will be invited to bid for city challenge resources.

My right hon. Friend intends to make resources available for 20 winning areas. Again they should each benefit from funding for some £37·5 million over the five years of their action plan. These 20 winning areas will be in addition to the 11 which were successful in the first round of city challenge.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities he expects to be awarded city challenge money in the next round of competition; and on what date he will announce the winners.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo).

Ozone Depletion

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the rate of development of ozone-depletion problems; and if he proposes to take any further measures in response to such developments.

Mr. Baldry: Reports have been received from the European arctic stratospheric ozone experiment—EASOE—and the United States National Aeronautic and Space Agency—NASA—of low ozone levels over the mid-latitudes of the northern hemisphere and in the tropics. The answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg) on 10 February, *Official Report*, column *430*, sets out what further measures we have proposed.

Community Charge

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list those local authorities which received such grants from central funds which, together with other income or contributions from balances, were able to determine that the community charge for the current year would be less than £100;

(2) if he will list those authorities which have secured grants from central funds which together with other income and contributions from balances have been able to determine that the community charge for 1992-93 will be less than £100.

Mr. Key: The following authorities maintained a tight control over their expenditure and were able to determine a community charge in 1991-92 below £100:

Rochester upon Medway
Wandsworth
Westminster

Information about the levels of community charges in 1992-93 is not yet available.

Housing Investment, Liverpool

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the level of the housing investment programme allocation awarded to Liverpool in each financial year since 1978-79; and what the changes amounted to, in real terms.

Mr. Yeo: Housing investment programme—HIP—allocation and gross capital expenditure figures are as follows:

£ thousands

	HIP allocation		*Gross Expenditure*[1]	
	cash value	*at 1991-92 prices*	*cash value*	*at 1991-92 prices*
1978-79	35,460	96,195	30,832	83,640
1979-80	42,430	98,651	52,611	122,322
1980-81	47,230	92,798	40,277	79,137
1981-82	39,788	71,293	35,479	63,572
1982-83	49,337	82,524	55,076	92,123
1983-84	41,850	66,901	60,700	97,034
1984-85	38,499	58,612	65,169	99,214
1985-86	31,000	44,727	83,751	120,837
1986-87	27,500	38,414	69,323	96,835
1987-88	25,300	33,518	64,651	85,652
1988-89	20,588	25,448	45,151	55,810
1989-90	23,349	27,103	49,338	57,271
New Capital Finance System[2]				
1990-91	38,037	40,700	55,194	59,058
[3]1991-92	31,620	31,620	[4]—	[4]—

Notes:

[1] Since 1981-82 local authorities have been able to augment the borrowing power of their HIP allocations by using the prescribed proportion of their capital receipts.

[2] From 1990-91, under the new capital finance system, the HIP allocation does not convey borrowing approval directly. The HIP allocation totals include supplementary credit approvals for housing projects.

[3] Provisional estimate of final allocation.

[4] Not available.

An initial HIP allocation of £26·7 million—£25·6 million at 1991-92 prices—has been issued for 1992-93 and additional resources—supplementary credit approvals—may be allocated later.

Chorley Report

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action has been taken following the Government's response to the Chorley report on handling geographic information.

Mr. Baldry: Following the Chorley report and the Government's response, the Government established an inter-departmental working group on the tradeable information initiative. The working group, which is chaired by my Department, has collated a summary of actions taken by individual departments in response to the recommendations made by Lord Chorley's committee of inquiry. A copy of the summary has been placed in the Library of the House, and a copy given to the Association for Geographic Information—AGI—as part of the Government's contribution to the association's review of progress against the Chorley committee's recommendations. In addition, the working group has collected details about spatially referenced data sets held by Government Departments. These details have been given to the AGI which has used them to establish an information service to answer inquiries about the data sets. The information service went live in January 1992.

Business Rates

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he has for the cost of allowing businesses in England to remain eligible for transitional relief from the uniform business rate although they move premises in 1992-93; and what would be the additional cost of returning eligibility for transitional relief in 1992-93 to those businesses that moved premises in 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* Transitional relief does not attach to businesses but to the property they occupy. The relief for the property is lost when the occupier changes. I estimate that the cost for the period 1990-91 to 1992-93 of returning transitional protection to property where there was a change of occupier in 1990-91 or 1991-92 would be around £90 million. The cost of allowing protection where there was a change of occupier in 1992-93 would be around £10 million.

Local Authorities (Financial Difficulties)

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy towards centre funding of local authorities which have financial difficulties due to *(a)* the collapse of BCCI and *(b)* late rating appeals and *(c)* interest rate swaps; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo *[pursuant to his reply, 17 December 1991, c. 108]:* My right hon. Friend intends to issue directions permitting local authorities which have incurred losses in BCCI and the Chancery and Edington banks to treat those losses as capital expenditure, where these are substantial in relation to an authority's revenue budget and reserves. He does not propose to approve any of the applications he has received for supplementary credit approvals—SCAs—related to such losses.

However, my right hon. Friend is now minded, out of resources which are available as a result of certain SCAs not being taken up to the anticipated extent, to issue SCAs to provide some assistance to those authorities most affected in 1991-92 by late rating adjustments of which they could not have been aware with certainty when setting their 1991-92 budgets. He has today invited authorities to provide him with information about their late rating adjustments, after receipt of which he intends to decide the level of assistance which in all the circumstances would be appropriate.

Assisted and Development Areas

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those areas in receipt of assisted or development area status, together with their working population.

Mr. Leigh: I have been asked to reply.

The following is the information:

Assisted Area Working Populations (April 1991)

Assisted Area Status	*Travel-to-work Area*	*Workforce*
South West		
IA	Bodmin and Liskeard	28,793
IA	Bude	8,094
IA	Cinderford and Ross-on-Wye	30,241

Assisted Area Status	Travel-to-work Area	Workforce
DA	Falmouth	14,843
DA	Helston	9,247
DA	Newquay	12,946
DA	Penzance and St. Ives	23,425
IA	Plymouth	147,884
DA	Redruth and Camborne	24,910
West Midlands		
IA	Birmingham	803,305
IA	Coventry and Hinckley	269,332
IA	Dudley and Sandwell	299,360
IA	Kidderminster	47,174
IA	Telford and Bridgnorth	85,166
IA	Walsall	172,542
IA	Wolverhampton	151,975
East Midlands		
DA	Corby	38,346
IA	Gainsborough	14,460
Yorkshire and Humberside		
IA	Barnsley	84,202
IA	Bradford	252,381
IA	Doncaster	115,628
IA	Grimsby	88,763
IA	Hull	222,670
DA	Rotherham and Mexborough	112,095
DA	Scunthorpe	68,932
IA	Sheffield	295,726
DA	Whitby	10,643
North West		
IA	Accrington and Rossendale	60,224
IA	Blackburn	73,490
IA	Bolton and Bury	205,719
DA	Liverpool	485,553
IA	Manchester	823,726
IA	Oldham	98,289
IA	Rochdale	71,603
DA	Widnes and Runcorn	63,752
DA	Wigan and St. Helens	192,172
DA	Wirral and Chester	229,477
Northern		
DA	Bishop Auckland	46,281
IA	Darlington	58,014
IA	Durham	69,686
DA	Hartlepool	40,488
DA	Middlesbrough	140,241
IA	Morpeth and Ashington	54,398
DA	Newcastle-upon-Tyne	395,649
DA	South Tyneside	56,603
DA	Stockton-on-Tees	84,814
DA	Sunderland	177,886
DA	Workington	33,752
Wales		
DA	Aberdare	23,428
IA	Bangor and Caernarfon	35,256
DA	Blaenau Gwent and Abergavenny	37,587
IA	Bridgend	63,515
IA	Cardiff	231,791
DA	Cardigan	10,727
IA	Fishguard	4,577
IA	Haverfordwest	23,496
DA	Holyhead	21,972
DA	Lampeter and Aberaeron	8,254
IA	Llanelli	36,218
DA	Merthyr and Rhymney	58,740
DA	Neath and Port Talbot	45,537
IA	Newport	96,088
IA	Pontypool and Cwmbran	46,019
DA	Pontypridd and Rhondda	72,691
IA	Porthmadoc and Ffestiniog	8,844
IA	Pwllheli	8,493
DA	Shotton, Flint and Rhyl	93,693
DA	South Pembrokeshire	16,514
IA	Swansea	119,563
DA	Wrexham	60,645
Scotland		
IA	Alloa	18,771
DA	Arbroath	11,426
IA	Ayr	55,447
IA	Badenoch	5,623
DA	Bathgate	53,122
IA	Campbeltown	4,887
DA	Cumnock and Sanquhar	15,570
DA	Dumbarton	32,472
DA	Dundee	100,479
IA	Dunfermline	54,846
IA	Dunoon and Bute	11,493
IA	Falkirk	68,369
IA	Forres	3,715
IA	Girvan	4,549
DA	Glasgow	664,038
DA	Greenock	42,758
IA	Invergordon and Dingwall	15,320
DA	Irvine	60,260
DA	Kilmarnock	35,135
IA	Kirkcaldy	67,663
DA	Lanarkshire	169,659
IA	Lochaber	9,714
IA	Newton Stewart	4,499
IA	Skye and Wester Ross	9,091
IA	Stewartry	9,563
IA	Stranraer	9,139
IA	Sutherland	5,545
IA	Western Isles	12,867
IA	Wick	5,440

Notes:

(1) The work force estimates are the sum of: estimated employees in employment; the unemployed; the self-employed; the armed forces; participants on work-related schemes.

(2) There are two forms of assisted area status; a more intense form, development area (DA) and a less intense, intermediate area (IA).

(3) The building block for the assisted areas map is the travel-to-work area (TTWA), which is the best approximation available to a self-contained labour market. TTWA boundaries do not always correspond to regional boundaries, so some of the TTWAs are listed above under one region, while in fact belonging to several regions.

(4) Only half of the Manchester TTWA has assisted area status, but the work force reported above relates to the whole TTWA. This is because of the lack of availability of post-census work force data for areas smaller than TTWAs.

ENERGY

Radiation

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what action will be taken to ensure that safety limits in relation to radiation exposure are lowered at nuclear establishments in Great Britain.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Dose limits and radiation protection standards apply to all workers across the European Community who work with ionising radiation, including those in the nuclear industry. The directive that sets these standards—European Community directive 80/836/EURATOM—as amended by 84/467/EURATOM, is implemented in the United Kingdom by the Ionising Radiations Regulations 1985—IRR 85—and

the mirror Northern Ireland legislation. These contain both statutory limits and requirements to carry out investigations at lower levels.

Last year, the Health and Safety Commission published part 4 of the approved code of practice supporting IRR 85 which contains additional guidance on restriction of exposure, but no change of statutory dose limit, to take account of recent revisions of the risk estimates from exposure to ionising radiation. This is an interim measure, pending revision of the European Community directive and subsequent revision of IRR 85 over the next few years.

Coal Production

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how much coal is mined per head of population in each Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country and member state of the European Community.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The information is as follows:

	Tonnes of coal produced per head of population in 1990
Australia	9·09
Austria	0·12
Belgium[1]	0·15
Canada	2·03
Denmark[1]	Nil
Finland	Nil
France[1]	0·21
Germany[1]	1·62
Greece[1]	1·05
Iceland	Nil
Ireland[1]	Nil
Italy[1]	0·01
Japan	0·05
Luxembourg[1]	Nil
Netherlands[1]	Nil
New Zealand	0·59
Norway	0.07
Portugal[1]	0·02
Spain[1]	0·44
Sweden	Nil
Switzerland	Nil
Turkey	0·30
United Kingdom[1]	1·64
United States	3·08

[1] Member states of the European Community (NB Germany refers to the (former) Federal Republic of Germany).
Source: Population—OECD Main Economic Indicators.
Source: Coal data—International Energy Agency.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how much coal is mined per head of population in Wales; and what was the equivalent figure in 1976, 1981 and 1986.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Coal production per head of population in Wales in the years 1976, 1981, 1986 and 1990 was:

	tonnes
1976	4·1
1981	4·2
1986	3·8
1990	2·5

Atomic Energy Authority, Harwell

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy which materials in use at the Atomic Energy Authority establishment at Harwell are covered by Euratom safeguards.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Uranium, thorium and plutonium are used at Harwell for civil purposes. In accordance with articles 77 and 197 of the Euratom treaty, all these materials are subject to Euratom safeguards.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy which buildings at the Atomic Energy Authority establishment at Harwell are covered by the tripartite International Atomic Energy Agency/Euratom/UK safeguards agreement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: For security reasons it is not our policy to disclose which buildings at nuclear establishments contain nuclear material. All civil nuclear material at Harwell and other establishments is subject to Euratom safeguards and to the terms of the UK-Euratom-International Atomic Energy Agency tripartite agreement.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on his meeting with the Major Energy Users Council as regards *(a)* the agenda, *(b)* the alternatives reviewed and *(c)* the outcome; and what assessment he has made of the impact of electricity prices in the next financial year on the large electricity consumers.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) on Thursday 13 February 1992, *Official Report*, column *588*.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Customs Allowances

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his most recent estimate of revenue losses the Treasury can expect from an increase in personal allowances from 300 duty-paid cigarettes to *(a)* 800 duty-paid cigarettes and *(b)* 800 duty-paid cigarettes and 1 km of hand-rolling tobacco and 400 cigars, following the relaxation of intra-Community customs barriers in 1993.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Travellers' allowances are due to be abolished from 1 January 1993 as part of the single market programme. The quantities referred to in the question are minimum indicative levels which have been agreed by the Council as part of a set of rules to enable member states to help distinguish commercial from private importations.

Considerable uncertainty must surround any estimate of the revenue effect of such a large relaxation of constraints on duty paid shopping. We have no estimates for the likely revenue loss from individual tobacco products. However, on the basis of the little evidence that is available, we estimate an annual loss from cross border shopping for all excise products, including alcoholic drinks, to be in the region of £½ billion. Most of this loss is associated with cigarettes.

VAT Registrations

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for the past five years the number of new VAT registrations in south Derbyshire, taking into account changes in the VAT registration limit.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The local VAT office in Derbyshire covers, in addition to the constituency of Derbyshire, South, parts of Leicestershire and Staffordshire. The number of VAT registrations processed by that office in the last five years is as follows:

Year	*New registrations*
1987	2,043
1988	2,483
1989	2,847
1990	2,370
1991	1,869

Foreign Fishing Vessels

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to ensure that owners and crews of foreign fishing vessels, registered in Britain and catching fish on British quotas, pay tax.

Mr. Maude: In general, tax is already payable by the owners and crews of foreign fishing vessels on the British register if they are resident in the United Kingdom for tax purposes or, in the case of the owners, if their profits arise through a permanent establishment in this country.

The Inland Revenue has liaison arrangements with both the Registry of Shipping and Seamen and Companies House to ensure that, as far as possible, owners or crews pay any United Kingdom tax which may be due.

Customs

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the security classification of Customs and Excise documents found in a desk bought from second-hand dealers in Scarborough in January; and what other Customs and Excise documents were found on the premises when officers from his Department inspected other desks that had been sent for disposal by the Customs and Excise; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The documents were not classified. All of the remaining furniture sold to the second-hand dealer was immediately examined at his premises. No further documents were found.

Income Statistics

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in work and responsible for children will have earnings below the tax threshold in the current year.

Mr. Maude: It is estimated that approximately 0·5 million families with earned income and with children are not liable to income tax in 1991-92. These estimates are based on a projection of the 1990 family expenditure survey and are therefore provisional.

Personal Wealth

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the current level of personal wealth per head of population in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Wales.

Mr. Maude: In 1989, the most recent year available, the average marketable wealth as defined in section 11 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1991", for the adult population, was £35,800 for the United Kingdom. I regret that figures for Wales are not available.

Car Boot Sales

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has of the annual turnover of car boot sales; and what representation he has received on their taxation.

Mr. Maude: Figures are not available, and I have not received any such representations.

EC (Net Contributors)

Mr. Allason: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which countries were net contributors to the European Community in 1991, or the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Maude: The latest information available is contained in the European Court of Auditors report for 1990. It gives information on member states' gross contributions and information on some 85 per cent. of receipts, with administration and research the main elements of internal expenditure excluded. The Court of Auditors report shows that in 1990 Germany, France and the United Kingdom were significant net contributors. Italy, Belgium and Luxembourg are also shown as net contributors, but none of them was likely to be in practice after taking account of expenditure excluded from the report. All other member states were net recipients.

Duty-free Limits

Mr. Butler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he intends to increase the duty-free limit for holidaymakers returning from outside the European Community.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The travellers' allowances for goods obtained outside the European Community are provided for under European Community legislation. There are quantitative allowances for tobacco products, wine, spirits, perfume and toilet water and a money allowance for all other goods which currently stands at £32. The Government have long been in favour of a substantial increase in the £32 allowance, but it has not so far been possible to obtain the necessary agreement of all member states. The Government will continue to press the point.

Tax Rates

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average and marginal tax rate including income tax and statutory social insurance payments of a single person, a married couple, and a family consisting of a married couple plus two children earning in total *(a)* half,

(b) three quarters, *(c)* average earnings, *(d)* 1·5 times, *(e)* twice, *(f)* three times, *(g)* five times and *(h)* 10 times average earnings, in each of the 12 EC member states.

Mr. Maude: Information for 1991-92 relating to the United Kingdom is given in the table.

Income tax and national insurance contributions at multiples of average earnings

Multiple of average earnings[1]	*Amount of tax and NIC*[2] *£ per week*	*Tax and NIC as percentage of gross earnings*	*Marginal tax and NIC rate*
Single person			
½	36·61	22·2	34
¾	64·64	26·1	34
1	92·68	28·1	34
1½	139·33	28·2	25
2	201·67	30·6	40
3	333·63	33·7	40
5	597·55	36·2	40
10	1,257·35	38·1	40
Married man (wife not earning)			
½	28·34	17·2	34
¾	56·38	22·8	34
1	84·41	25·6	34
1½	131·06	26·5	25
2	188·44	28·6	40
3	320·40	32·4	40
5	584·32	35·4	40
10	1,244·12	37·7	40

[1] Average earnings are taken to be the average gross weekly earnings of full-time males on adult rates with pay unaffected by absence. These are estimated to be £329·90 per week in 1991-92 using the Government Actuary's Department assumption of 7·75 per cent. growth in whole economy underlying earnings over 1990-91 as published in the 1991 Autumn Statement.

[2] National insurance contributions are at the standard Class 1 rate for employees not contracted-out of the state additional (earnings related) pension scheme. The tax figures assume that no allowances or reliefs are available other than the standard allowances.

Similar information on the other EC member states is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Some of the information requested is, however, obtainable from "The Tax/Benefit Position of Production Workers 1987-1990" published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. A copy is available in the Library.

EC Budget

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the financial contributions made by each member state in £ sterling to the European Community and their net receipts under European Community expenditure in each of the last five years.

Mr. Maude: Member states' gross contributions to the European Community budget for the last five years for which outturn information is available were as follows:

£ billion

	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Belgium	1·0	1·2	1·2	1·2	1·3
Denmark	0·5	0·6	0·6	0·6	0·6
Germany	5·9	6·6	7·7	7·5	7·4
Greece	0·4	0·2	0·3	0·4	0·4
Spain	1·6	1·2	2·1	2·1	2·6
France	4·6	5·2	6·0	5·8	5·8
Ireland	0·2	0·2	0·2	0·2	0·3
Italy	3·2	3·7	4·4	4·3	4·4
Luxembourg	[1]—	0·1	0·1	[1]—	0·1
Netherlands	1·5	1·7	1·9	1·8	1·9
Portugal	0·2	0·2	0·3	0·3	0·4
United Kingdom	3·2	4·0	3·5	4·4	4·7

Source: European Court of Auditors' Report, converted to £ sterling at the annual average exchange rate for each year.
Note: (1) [1]— signifies contribution of less than £0·05 billion.
(2) The table gives contributions after allowing for the United Kingdom's abatement.

Full details of member states' receipts are not published. However the 1990 Court of Auditors report allocates some 85 per cent. of budgetary payments, the main items of internal expenditure excluded are administration and research. It gives receipts over the last five years for which information is available as follows:

£ billion

	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Belgium	0·8	0·7	0·6	0·5	0·7
Denmark	0·8	0·8	0·9	0·7	0·9
Germany	3·3	3·2	3·6	3·1	3·4
Greece	1·3	1·3	1·3	1·7	2·2
Spain	1·6	1·4	2·7	3·3	3·8
France	4·2	4·8	4·9	3·8	4·5
Ireland	1·1	1·0	1·0	1·1	1·6
Italy	3·0	3·7	3·7	4·1	4·1
Luxembourg	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Netherlands	1·6	2·0	2·6	2·6	2·1
Portugal	0·3	0·5	0·6	0·7	0·8
United Kingdom	2·3	2·2	2·2	2·2	2·2

Note: [1]— signifies contribution of less than £0·05 billion.

Cider

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to protect the interests of the British cider industry from proposals made by the European Commission.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* Current Commission proposals place cider with either still or sparkling wine for taxation purposes. The proposals have yet to come before the Council of Ministers and their adoption would require unanimity. The Government have already assured the United Kingdom cider industry that we will support their case for treating cider and perry as a separate tax category.

Privatisation

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list *(a)* outstanding instalments from earlier flotations of nationalised industries or governmental holdings in privatised companies, *(b)* the market value of each such instalment on 1 January, *(c)* what revenue he currently expects to receive from each instalment and *(d)* when he expects to receive the revenue from each particular instalment.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* The table shows, for each outstanding instalment, the share offer, the month in which payment is due and the expected proceeds. No market value can be given for an outstanding instalment, as none exists until the share price listing is amended by the stock exchange to reflect the imminent payment of such an instalment.

Outstanding instalments from the sale of shares

Share offer	*Month of receipt*	*Expected proceeds (£ million)*
Scottish Electricity Companies—second instalment	May 1992	835
BT—second instalment	July 1992	1,915
Regional Electricity Companies—third instalment	September 1992	1,465
BT—third instalment	March 1993	1,675
Scottish Electricity Companies—third instalment	April 1993	835

Research Funding

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the level of Government civil research and development funding as a percentage of total Government expenditure in each year since 1979.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* The available information is as follows:

Government civil research and development expenditure as a percentage of total central Government expenditure

Year	*Per cent.*
1979-80	2·5
1980-81	2·4
1981-82	2·5
1982-83	2·3
1983-84	2·3
1984-85	2·2
1985-86	2·2
1986-87	2·2
1987-88	2·2
1988-89	2·2
1989-90	2·1

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the level of research funding of every Government Department in real and constant prices in each year since 1979.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* The available information from 1981 is given in tables 1.2.1 and 1.2.2 of the "Annual Review of Government Funded Research and Development 1991", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Detailed departmental information on a comparable basis for earlier years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gibraltar

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was Her Majesty's Government's contribution in cash and kind to the economy of Gibraltar in the current and previous financial years.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces on 14 February. In addition to the MOD's contribution, the ODA's expenditure in Gibraltar will be £950,000 in this financial year. For 1990-91 it was £948,000. The bulk is capital aid; the remainder, funds for technical co-operation, for example, consultants' expertise. During the two years in question the diplomatic wing provided £63,370 for various small projects, principally police and customs training courses and equipment. We are unable to put a precise figure on the value to Gibraltar's economy of our general administrative assistance and advice.

Iran

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about the number of judicial executions carried out in Iran last year.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: According to Amnesty International's most recent information, there have been 775 executions in Iran in 1991.

Montreal Protocol

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the states which have (i) signed, (ii) ratified or (iii) acceded to the Montreal protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The following states have signed, ratified, acceded to or accepted the Montreal protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer as indicated (s = signed; r = ratified; Ac = acceded; At = accepted; Ap = approved):

Country	*Abbreviation*
Argentina	(R)
Australia	(R)
Austria	(R)
Bahrain	(Ac)
Bangladesh	(Ac)
Belgium	(R)
Brazil	(Ac)
Bulgaria	(Ac)
Burkina Faso	(R)
Belorussia	(Ac)
Cameroon	(Ac)
Canada	(R)
Chile	(R)
Congo	(S)
Costa Rica	(Ac)
Czechoslovakia	(Ac)
Denmark	(R)
Ecuador	(Ac)
Egypt	(R)
Fiji	(Ac)
Finland	(R)
France	(Ap)
Gambia	(Ac)
Germany, Federal Republic	(Ac)
Ghana	(R)
Greece	(R)
Guatemala	(Ac)
Hungary	(Ac)
Iceland	(Ac)
Indonesia	(S)
Iran	(Ac)
Ireland	(R)
Israel	(S)
Italy	(R)
Japan	(R)
Jordan	(Ac)
Kenya	(R)
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	(Ac)
Liechtenstein	(Ac)
Luxembourg	(R)

Country	Abbreviation
Malawi	(Ac)
Malaysia	(Ac)
Maldives	(R)
Malta	(R)
Mexico	(Ac)
Morocco	(S)
Netherlands	(At)
New Zealand	(R)
Nigeria	(Ac)
Norway	(R)
Panama	(R)
Philippines	(R)
Poland	(Ac)
Portugal	(R)
Russia	(At)
Senegal	(S)
Singapore	(Ac)
South Africa	(Ac)
Spain	(R)
Sri Lanka	(Ac)
Sweden	(R)
Switzerland	(R)
Syrian Arab Republic	(Ac)
Thailand	(R)
Trinidad and Tobago	(Ac)
Tunisia	(Ac)
Turkey	(Ac)
Uganda	(R)
Ukraine	(At)
United Arab Emirates	(Ac)
United Kingdom	(R)
Uruguay	(Ac)
United States of America	(R)
Venezuela	(R)
Yugoslavia	(Ac)
Zambia	(Ac)
EEC	(Ap)

The following 15 countries have also ratified the 1990 London amendment to the Montreal protocol.

Canada
China
Denmark
Finland
Germany
Ireland
Japan
Maldives
Mexico
Netherlands
New Zealand
Norway
Sweden
UK
USA
EEC

EC Committee of the Regions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the consultation procedures he proposes in order to establish the proper means of representation for the United Kingdom on the committee of the regions.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We are considering the arrangements for appointing the United Kingdom members to the committee, which will be convened only after the treaty on political union enters into force.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom has signed the protocol on the committee of the regions annexed to the Maastricht treaty under article 198(a)-(c).

Mr. Garel-Jones: Yes. This protocol forms in integral part of the European Community treaty and was therefore covered by the signatures of the treaty on European union by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury.

Arms Exports

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what impact the Gulf war has had on his Department's monitoring of the export of weapons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: All export licence applications for the export of weapons to any destination have always been, and remain, subject to rigorous scrutiny.

Vietnamese Migrants

Sir William Shelton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Vietnamese migrants.

Mr. Hurd: On 12 February, 36 illegal immigrants were repatriated from Hong Kong on the third mandatory flight under the orderly repatriation programme of 29 October 1991. They had all been screened out under procedures approved by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees—UNHCR—and were returned to Vietnam in accordance with international practice. The operation went smoothly.

The first phase of the orderly repatriation programme agreed with the Vietnamese Government on 29 October has succeeded in reducing the camp population in Hong Kong, encouraging migrants already there to return to Vietnam and stopping the flow of arrivals to Hong Kong. The camp population in Hong Kong has fallen from a peak on 5 October 1991 of 64,314 to 58,762 now. Whereas 20,163 Vietnamese arrived in Hong Kong in the first 10 months of 1991, only 45 arrived in November and December. Only four have arrived so far in 1992. In the first 10 months of 1991 an average of 500 Vietnamese per month returned voluntarily to Vietnam under UNHCR auspices. In contrast, 1,900 returned voluntarily in November and 1,800 in December. So far this year UNHCR has repatriated 1,191. This is substantial progress, though the pressures on Hong Kong are still severe.

In total, more than 20,000 migrants have so far been repatriated to Vietnam under UNHCR auspices from countries of first asylum in the region. There has not been a single substantiated case of persecution. Only if migrants are returned to their country of origin can the genuine refugees be properly looked after and resettled in accordance with their international rights.

Cambodia

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contributions the United Kingdom is making towards United Nations peacekeeping operations in Cambodia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The UK's assessed contribution towards the United Nations advance mission in Cambodia is estimated to be £500,000.

Parliamentary approval for this new service will be sought in the spring supplementary estimate for "Foreign

and Commonwealth Office: other external relations vote", class II, vote 2. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £500,000 will be met by a repayable advance from the Contingencies Fund.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Football (Arrests)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his review of the case of the Everton football fans arrested in the vicinity of Arsenal stadium, Highbury, on 19 December 1987.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Representations made about this case are still under consideration.

Fire Services, Northumberland

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he has approved the Northumberland fire authority's proposal to close the Holy Island fire station; and what consideration he has given to the implications for this proposed closure of the authority's proposal to withdraw full-time firemen from Alnwick;

(2) whether he has yet received the proposal from the Northumberland fire authority for approval of a change from full-time to a retained fire station in Alnwick.

Mr. John Patten: There is no proposal to close the Holy Island fire station, and the Northumberland county council's proposal to disband the island's volunteer fire crew remains subject to determination by the Home Secretary. No proposals for the future status of Alnwick fire station have been received. Should a change from wholetime to retained status be submitted, the implications for the provision of fire cover would be fully assessed before the Home Secretary decided whether to approve it.

Life Sentence

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what representations he has received to amend the law to make the life sentence the maximum rather than the mandatory sentence for murder;

(2) what action he intends to take in response to the House of Lords Select Committee report on murder and life imprisonment—House of Lords Paper 78 of Session 1988-89; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend keeps the mandatory life sentence for murder under review in the light of the representations which he receives from time to time. During the passage of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, Parliament endorsed the Government's view that the mandatory life sentence should remain to mark the particular heinousness of murder.

Metropolitan Police

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what will be the total cost to public funds of the Metropolitan police in 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: As police authority for the metropolis, I have approved estimates which provide for net revenue expenditure of £1,523·043 million in 1992-93. There will be a cash limit on current expenditure of £1,478·764 million. Capital expenditure is subject to separate control.

I have also approved the issue of a precept of £135·43 per head of relevant population of Metropolitan police purposes. This is not the sum levied on individual community charge payers, but will be levied on local authorities' collection funds which include income from revenue support grant and national non-domestic rates as well as the community charge.

Compensation (Crime)

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the extent to which compensation has been awarded by the courts to victims during the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available in accordance with the powers conferred by the powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973 as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1988; and when he intends to evaluate the effectiveness of the legislation in assisting the victims of crime.

Mr. John Patten: The table gives information on the use of compensation orders by the criminal courts in 1989, the latest year for which final figures are available. Provisional figures for 1990 are given in brackets.

	1989[1]	*1990*
Crown Court		
Indictable offences	12,400	(11,900)
Summary offences[2]	400	(500)
Magistrates courts		
Indictable offences	70,500	(73,600)
Summary offences[2]	43,000	(43,600)
Total	[3]126,400	(129,600)

[1] *Source:* Criminal Statistics 1989.
[2] The Criminal Statistics exclude summary motoring offences.
[3] All figures rounded to the nearest hundred.

The Home Office research and planning unit has been studying the use of compensation orders in the magistrates courts, including the effect of changes introduced by the Criminal Justice Act 1988. It is hoped that a report of its findings will be published later this year.

Police National Computer

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which indexes of police national computer 1 are still in use; and for how long they are to remain in use.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The following applications remain on the PNC1 equipment but are not in general use by police forces:

Fingerprint checks for court appearances in the Metropolitan Police District.
Major investigations.
Extremist crime index.
Crime pattern analysis.

The fingerprint application will be transferred to PNC2 later this year and future arrangements for the other applications are being considered. The aim is to take PNC1 out of service as soon as it is practicable to do so.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has agreed a policy

with the Association of Chief Police Officers and Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland) on the establishment of uniform criteria for the recording of HIV status on the police national computer.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In deciding to include warning markers on health, disposition or likely behaviour in PNC records, the police must have regard to the principles underlying the Data Protection Act 1984 on the relevance and accuracy of the information. A working group is currently reviewing the existing guidance to the police about HIV.

Interpol

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for the past five years (i) the United Kingdom's annual subscription to Interpol and (ii) any additional levies and their purpose.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The United Kingdom's annual subscription to Interpol for the last five years has been as follows:

	£
1987-88	440,487
1988-89	428,437
1989-90	433,579
1990-91	510,109
1991-92	497,593

There are no additional levies.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans there are to enhance the facilities or services provided by the European liaison bureau of Interpol.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is planned to recruit as wide a representation as possible in order to ensure that the maximum number of European countries, including eastern Europe, are represented. Other ways of enhancing the service provided by the bureau are under consideration by Interpol.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the budget and current level of staffing at the European liaison bureau at Interpol headquarters; what languages are covered within the bureau; and what is the formal brief of the bureau.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The salaries and related expenses of officers seconded to the bureau are paid for by the seconding countries. The remaining costs of the bureau —for example accommodation and equipment—come from the overall Interpol secretariat budget. It is not possible therefore readily to identify the total cost of the bureau. English, French, Spanish, Greek, Italian, German and Finnish are all covered within the bureau. The brief of the bureau is to resolve difficulties and improve co-operation, and to provide a liaison service to the European countries. The bureau also provides support to the Interpol European committee and the annual European regional conference.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, for the past five years (i) how many messages were handled by the United Kingdom national central bureau of Interpol per year and (ii) the annual maintenance costs of the United Kingdom national central bureau.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The number of messages handled by the United Kingdom national central bureau of Interpol in the last five years were:

	Number
1987	54,665
1988	59,081
1989	62,812
1990	63,483
1991	67,086

The annual running costs for the United Kingdom national central bureau in the last five years were:

	£
1987-88	1,490,768
1988-89	1,538,949
1989-90	1,678,302
1990-91	1,836,588
[1]1991-92	2,927,000

[1] The figure for 1991-92 is an estimate. It includes VAT for 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92 which had not been paid in earlier years.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans there are to establish computer linkages between the United Kingdom national central bureau and Interpol headquarters.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The automated search facility is being set up at Interpol headquarters in Lyon. This will have a selected data base of information of wanted persons and criminals of international importance which will be available to direct search from national central bureaux in member countries.

Europol

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans there are to establish *(a)* a central computerised databank for Europol and *(b)* a data protection authority to monitor the use and collation of data by Europol.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Europol drugs unit will be the first element of Europol to be established and work is in hand to identify both the data requirements of the unit and any necessary equipment for the storage of data. The need for data protection is recognised and consideration is currently being given to the establishment of a data protection regime for the unit acceptable to the participating member states and capable of expansion to cover all aspects of Europol as the organisation develops.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if data held by Europol will be subject to the Council of Europe's recommendation R (87) 15 of 17 September 1987 relating to the use of personal data in the police sector.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The data protection regime for Europol is currently under consideration. The United Kingdom is fully involved in this work. We shall seek to ensure that the procedures adopted are consistent with the Data Protection Act 1984 and recommendation (87)15, subject only to the United Kingdom's reserves on articles 2.2 and 2.4 of that recommendation.

Charities (Europe)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had and intends to have with representatives of voluntary organisations and the Charity Commission over the proposal by the European Commission for a statute for European associations.

Mr. John Patten: I understand that the Commission has approved proposals for a statute for European associations but that the texts have not yet been formally promulgated. My officials, and those of the Charity Commission, have had informal discussions on the draft proposals and we shall want to consult widely once we have the formal texts.

Police Intelligence

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to establish a computer interface between the police national computer and the Schengen information system computer; when this will occur; and what elements of police intelligence will be exchanged between the systems.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There are no such plans. The provision of a European information system was considered at the European Council at Maastricht in December 1991. The following extract from the conclusions of the European Council is relevant:

"The European Council requests the Co-ordinators to examine what the structure of the European Information System should be and to take care that the technical and legal provisions—including the protection of personal privacy—are being taken to build the system. In view of the need for a speedy conclusion of these activities, it is desirable in the first place to establish whether the arrangements already existing between certain Member States may also apply to all the Member States."

Motoring Fines

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total amount paid in fines in respect of motoring offences for the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available; and what was the amount paid in respect of fines for all other civil and criminal offences.

Mr. John Patten: The total income from fines, fees and fixed penalties collected by magistrates courts in England and Wales in 1990-91 was £269,088,000. Figures for motoring offences are not separately recorded.

Community Charge

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes in the law he proposes to introduce to facilitate the consideration by magistrates courts of applications for liability orders in community charge proceeding.

Mr. Portillo *[pursuant to his answer, 28 January 1992 column 473]:* To assist authorities further we are prepared to consider, in response to an application by an authority, granting an increase in its aggregate credit limit for 1992-93 to cover those unpaid 1990-91 community charges which it expects to collect during 1992-93. This is in recognition that some authorities may need a longer period to recover uncollected 1990-91 charges, and will enable such an authority to continue to borrow to cover those debts until it collects them during the course of next year.

PRIME MINISTER

Bromley

Q10. **Mr. Sims:** To ask the Prime Minister if he has any plans to visit the London borough of Bromley.

The Prime Minister: I am making plans for a series of visits to all parts of the country and hope to include Kent among them.

Underground Nuclear Explosions

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Prime Minister if a member of his foreign affairs staff attended the seminar on the detection and recognition of underground nuclear explosions held at the Geological Society, London, on 14 February; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Yes, along with experts from the Ministry of Defence seismological centre at Blacknest. We welcome opportunities for constructive discussion of these issues. The United Kingdom has, therefore, been participating actively in related work in the conference on disarmament in Geneva.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Constituencies

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Prime Minister what is the average constituency electorate in *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dorrell: I have been asked to reply.

The United Kingdom constituencies with largest and smallest parliamentary electorates in 1991 were as follows:

	Number
Largest	
Isle of Wight	101,784
Eastleigh	91,871
Huntingdon	91,779
East Hampshire	91,519
The Wrekin	90,980
Swindon	90,343
Smallest	
Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale	39,608
Glasgow Provan	37,838
Meirionnydd Nant Conwy	32,754
Orkney and Shetland	31,355

	Number
Caithness and Sutherland	31,120
Western Isles	23,073

The average parliamentary constituency electorates in 1991 were 66,908 in the United Kingdom and 66,915 in Great Britain (counting Milton Keynes as two constituencies in both cases). Corresponding information relating to the 1992 registers is not yet available.

TRANSPORT

A40

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will install traffic lights on the A40 Green road roundabout, Headington, Oxford.

Mr. Chope: We intend to carry out during the 1992-93 financial year a substantial remodelling of the roundabout which should provide it with sufficient traffic capacity until our proposed major A40 Headington improvement scheme can be put in place. This does not involve the installation of traffic signals.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will hold a public inquiry with the A40 road proposals north of Headington.

Mr. Chope: A public inquiry for the proposed A40 Headington improvement will be held after publication of draft statutory orders if the draft orders are subject to objection.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish all environmental, financial and road traffic forecasts relevant to the A40 road proposals north of Oxford, including those relating to alternative options considered.

Mr. Chope: An environmental statement will be published for the A40 north of Oxford scheme when draft statutory orders are published. The statement will include reference to alternative options considered. Road traffic forecasts and estimated scheme costs will also be available at that stage.

Road Planning

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his Department's progress in reducing planning times for new roads, as recommended by the 15th report on road planning by the Committee of Public Accounts (Session 1988-89).

Mr. Chope: The Department has implemented several measures to reduce the planning time for new roads, including the streamlining of procedures and the introduction of new forms of contracts for consultants engaged in design. These have enabled the Department to meet its target, noted by the Committee of Public Accounts in 1989, of reaching public consultation within three years rather than five years of a decision to put a scheme into the road programme. The Department is now assessing ways in which the best project management practice of the private sector can be applied to further speed up progress on road schemes.

Traffic Flows

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the latest traffic flow figures for all links in the motorway network where the flows are in excess of 80,000 vehicles per day.

Mr. Chope: The latest figures from the national traffic census are as follows. Apart from the M25, these are approximate estimates derived from a single 12-hour count per link undertaken some time between 1985 and 1990.

Estimated daily flows for 1990 (both directions combined)

Road number	*Start junction*	*End junction*	*Daily flow thousands*
M1	5	6	83
M1	7	M25	134
M1	8	9	131
M1	9	10	130
M1	10	11	106
M1	11	12	119
M1	12	13	104
M1	13	14	82
M1	16	17	95
M1	17	18	81
M1	18	19	83
M25	2	3	87
M25	5	6	93
M25	6	7	99
M25	7	8	111
M25	8	9	106
M25	9	10	106
M25	10	11	128
M25	11	12	141
M25	12	13	143
M25	13	14	158
M25	14	15	147
M25	15	16	138
M25	16	17	122
M25	17	18	130
M25	18	19	129
M25	19	20	108
M25	20	21	115
M25	21	22	101
M25	22	23	109
M25	23	24	113
M25	24	25	104
M25	25	26	104
M25	26	27	96
M25	27	28	103
M25	28	29	86
M27	M275	A27	89
M3	2	3	94
M3	3	4	83
M4	2	3	94
M4	3	4	130
M4	4	4B	121
M4	4B	5	130
M4	5	6	120
M4	6	7	127
M4	7	9	106
M4	9	10	95
M4	10	11	95
M4	14	15	86
M40	1A	2	83
M5	1	2	81
M5	1	M6	87
M56	3	4	97
M56	4	5	112
M56	5	6	93
M6	2	3	92
M6	3	4	89
M6	4	5	85
M6	5	6	82
M6	6	7	117
M6	8	9	142
M6	10A	11	81
M6	13	14	86
M6	14	15	86
M6	16	17	98
M6	17	18	82
M6	18	19	80
M6	19	20	81
M6	20	21	99
M6	20	M6/J9	101
M6	21	21A	103
M6	22	23	80
M6	24	25	84
M6	31	32	84
M62	12	13	140

Road number	Start junction	End junction	Daily flow thousands
M62	13	14	111
M62	15	17	118
M62	15	M61	105
M62	17	18	130
M62	18	19	99
M62	19	20	89
M62	26	27	90
M63	7	8	81
M63	10	A560	99
M8	11	12	81
M8	12	15	123
M8	15	16	134
M8	16	18	96
M8	18	19	83
M8	19	20	137
M8	22	23	101
M8	25	26	80
A38M	M6/J6	Aston	103
A40M	M41	A404	87
A6127	A1058	A187	88

Bridge, Portrack

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if it is his policy to maintain a high level bridge over the River Tees at Portrack following the permanent closing of the Cannon Park lifting bridge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Yes we intend to maintain the trunk road high level bridge over the River Tees. The Cannon Park, Newport, lifting bridge is the responsibility of the local highway authority, Cleveland county council. It is our understanding that this bridge will remain open as a road bridge.

Supplementary Grant Schemes

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the expected level of expenditure on committed transport supplementary grant schemes in the years *(a)* 1993-94, *(b)* 1994-95 and *(c)* 1995-96.

Mr. Rifkind: According to local highway authorities transport policies and programme submissions for 1992-93, the total figures forecast for major schemes accepted for transport supplementary grant are £466 million, £301 million and £136 million respectively.

Diesel-powered Cars

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what initiatives his Department proposes to encourage greater use of diesel-powered cars.

Mr. Chope: There is less tax on diesel fuel than petrol. The greater fuel economy of diesel cars also acts as a considerable incentive to purchasers. The cost of adding catalysts to petrol cars will also reduce or remove their price advantage and provide a further incentive to the purchase of diesel cars.

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the EC agreed standards of emissions of oxides of nitrogen from diesel-powered cars.

Mr. Chope: EC directive 91/441/EEC, which takes effect on all new cars sold from 31 December 1992, applies a single standard for the combined sum of hydrocarbons —HC—and oxides of nitrogen—NOx. The limit value for HC + NOx applicable to type-approval testing is 0·97g/km, and that for conformity of production testing is 1·13g/km. It does not differentiate between petrol and diesel cars in the application of this standard, except to allow a derogation up to 31 December 1994 for cars fitted with a diesel engine of the direct injection type, which may exceed the limit value by 40 per cent. The directive, which will mean that all new petrol-engined cars will have to be fitted with three-way catalysts, will make a substantial contribution to the Government's objective of improving local air quality.

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice he has received concerning the role of the diesel-powered car in reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

Mr. Chope: The Government have been advised by the motor industry that a shift towards the greater use of diesel cars could offer immediate benefits in terms of carbon dioxide reduction in the order of 15 to 20 per cent. per vehicle. Diesel vehicles will, however, continue to produce higher emissions of particulates and are likely to offer less scope for reductions in NOx emissions than catalyst-equipped petrol cars.

M3 Extension

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the extension of the M3.

Mr. Chope: The Department has continued to receive representations both in support of and against the planned extension of the M3 around Winchester.

"Buses Mean Business"

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what portion of the £10 million special funding from his Department for demonstration projects submitted in response to the "Buses Mean Business" report, announced on 16 December 1991, he intends to award to Scottish bus companies.

Mr. Freeman: The £10 million announced on 16 December 1991 is to fund specific English local authority bus priority schemes over the next two years. Bus priority schemes in Scotland are a matter for the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Traffic Flow, Leicestershire

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will supply traffic flow figures in both directions, and the dates for each census taken, for *(a)* the A47 between Houghton on the Hill and the beginning of Bushby, *(b)* the A47 between Bushby and Springfield lane, *(c)* Spencefield lane from the A47 to the Downing drive junction, *(d)* Spencefield lane from the Downing drive junction to Goodwood road/Marydene drive, *(e)* Spencefield lane from Marydene drive/Goodwood road junction to Church road, *(f)* High street/Evington lane to the Waterley road/Stoughton drive junction, *(g)* Stoughton drive from Evington lane to the roundabout on Gartree road, *(h)* Goodwood road from

the A47 to the junction of Spencefield lane, *(i)* Downing drive from the A47 to the junction at Spencefield lane and *(j)* Whitehall road from its junction at Spencefield lane to Ethel road.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* The traffic flows on the A47 trunk road between the city boundary and Houghton on the Hill are:

(i) A47 at the junction with Downing drive on 12 June 1990—7 am to 7 pm
6,950 vehicles travelling to Leicester
6,724 vehicles travelling to Uppingham

(ii) A47 near the junction with Station road on 26 June 1991—7 am to 7 pm
6,122 vehicles travelling to Leicester
6,772 vehicles travelling to Uppingham

(iii) A47 at Bushby on 11 April 1991—7 am to 7 pm
5,607 vehicles travelling to Leicester
6,114 vehicles travelling to Uppingham

(iv) A47 west of Bushby on 17 October 1991—7 am to 7 pm
5,396 vehicles travelling to Leicester
5,878 vehicles travelling to Uppingham

The other traffic flow figures requested are on local roads for which Leicestershire county council, as the highway authority, is responsible.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the estimated increased traffic flow figures within the east of Leicester *(a)* upon completion of the Leicester western bypass, *(b)* one year after completion and *(c)* five years after completion.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* There is no forecast increase in traffic flows within the east of Leicester arising from the construction of the Leicester western bypass. Thereafter, traffic flows are expected to increase in line with national forecasts. However, in urban situations, other factors such as development proposals could influence future flows.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the estimated increased traffic flow figures along *(a)* the A47 towards Peterborough and *(b)* A6 Great Glen because of the completion of the Leicester western bypass.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* No increase in traffic flows along these roads is predicted as a rresult of Leicester western bypass.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will instruct Travers Morgan to extend its brief on the Leicester eastern bypass to include the Henwood proposals from the A46 north to the M1 south.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* No. The consultants' brief is to investigate possible routes to connect the A46 to the A6 to remove through traffic from the urban areas of Leicester. Traffic wishing to leave the A46 north of Leicester to join the M1 will use the Leicester western bypass when complete.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how predicted traffic flows on the Leicester eastern district distributor road would be affected if the Henwood proposals for a Leicester bypass were implemented.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* The prediction of traffic flows on the Leicester eastern district distributor road is a matter for the local highway authority, Leicestershire county council.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will carry out origin/destination surveys on traffic using *(a)* Spencefield lane, *(b)* Goodwood road, *(c)* Stoughton drive and *(d)* Stoughton drive south, in the city of Leicester.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* No. These roads are the responsibility of the local highway authority, Leicestershire county council.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will supply traffic flow figures in both directions and the dates for each census taken, for *(a)* the A6 between Stoughton road, Leicester and the race course, *(b)* the A6 between the race course and the traffic lights at New street, *(c)* the A6 between the traffic lights at New street and Great Glen, *(d)* Stoughton drive south, *(e)* from the traffic lights at New street on the A6 Oadby to Stoughton road/Gartree road junction and *(f)* Palmerston way between the race course roundabout and the Welford road.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* The traffic flows on the A6 trunk road between the city boundary and Great Glen are:

(i) A6 with the junction of Victoria court, Oadby on 14 May 1991—(7 am to 7 pm)
9,854 vehicles travelling to Great Glen
9,981 vehicles travelling to Leicester

(ii) A6 with the junction of New street, Oadby on 19 June 1990—(7 am to 7 pm)
2,810 vehicles travelling to Great Glen
4,235 vehicles travelling to Leicester

(iii) A6 with the junction of Gorse lane on 27 June 1991—(7 am to 7 pm)
7,597 vehicles travelling to Great Glen
7,943 vehicles travelling to Leicester

The other traffic flow figures requested are on local roads for which Leicestershire county council, as the highway authority are responsible.

Air Pollution, Oadby

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the present air pollution levels on the A6 at Oadby *(a)* at the race course roundabout and *(b)* at the Victoria Court flats; and by how much they are expected to increase if the Leicester eastern district distributor road is built.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* The information requested is not available.

Tyres

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultation his Department had with the European Commission on tyre tread depth prior to the adoption of EC directive 89/459.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* The Department of Transport was consulted by the European Commission on tyre tread depth in 1986. The Department, which had recently carried out a review of the issue, reported that it was satisfied with the operation of the national laws then in force, and that the proposed change would not greatly benefit road safety while imposing an unacceptable increase in cost on the motorist.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) reported to the House on 7 June 1989, *Official Report*, columns *142-43*, the United

Kingdom voted against the measure, but it was adopted by other member states on the basis of qualified majority voting.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what evidence he has on the effect of tyre tread depth on road safety and the number of accidents.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* Although it is recognised that an increase in legal tread depth brings about an all-round improvement in the condition of worn tyres on the road, research carried out to date has indicated that illegal tyre tread depth is a main contributory factor in less than 1 per cent. of accidents.

Tyre tread depth differences in the range 1 to 2 mm would only make a significant difference to braking distances at speeds of 50 mph or more in wet weather on smooth surfaces. Only a very small proportion of accidents occur in these conditions.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Citizens Charter

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his Ministry's contribution to the citizens charter.

Mr. Gummer: Principles such as those in the citizens charter have particularly guided this Ministry's programme for the past two years. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the establishment of the food safety directorate, the consumer panel, regular meetings with consumer organisations, and the announcement of a review of flood defence and coastal protection with those concerned, including environmental organisations.

As I indicated on appointment, this is a consumer Ministry. I have already announced the restructuring of our regional organisation to make it more effective in meeting the requirements of one important group of customers.

The citizens charter principles will be taken forward in the Ministry and its agencies.

Bananas

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what are the implications for African, Caribbean and Pacific countries' bananas of the compromise text on agriculture in the GATT negotiations put forward on 20 December 1991;

(2) what account he took of the banana protocol of the Lomé convention in considering the draft compromise for the final agreement on the GATT-Uruguay round of negotiations put forward on 20 December 1991;

(3) what changes have taken place in Government policy with regard to the United Kingdom's traditional banana suppliers in the Caribbean since the commitments made by the former Prime Minister in Jamaica in 1987.

Mr. Curry: The draft text circulated by the GATT Director General on 20 December 1991 covered all products. It remains under negotiation and it is at present not clear what final agreement may be reached, nor whether the Community will wish to deal with bananas on the same basis as other products. The impact of tariffication on ACP banana industries would depend on the size of any tariffs proposed and on the precise terms of any provisions for maintaining current access opportunities. We remain committed to fulfilling our obligations under the Lomé convention and to bringing the GATT round to an early and successful conclusion.

Fish (Intervention Scheme)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on the withdrawal of the intervention scheme as it relates to fish.

Mr. Curry: The withdrawal arrangements are a permanent and integral feature of the basic Community marketing regime for fish.

Water Quality

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *80*, regarding the implementation of EC directive 91/492/EC, if he will specify the date on which he expects the classification work to be completed.

Mr. Curry: Under EC directive 91/492/EEC, classification of shellfish harvesting areas must be operative by 1 January 1993. I appreciate that shellfish producers will need the longest possible warning of the likely classifications, and we will publish results at the earliest possible date.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Malawi

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all current bilateral aid contracts between the United Kingdom and Malawi.

Mrs. Chalker: Current bilateral aid agreements between Britain and Malawi are as follows:

General Agreements (governing the provision of capital aid and technical co-operation):-

1974 Technical Co-operation Memorandum of Understanding
1983 Grant Agreement
1986 Grant Agreement

Specific Project Agreements (by sector):-

Natural Resources
- Mulanje-Thalombe Fish Farm
- Traditional Fisheries
- Demersal Fisheries
- Likoma/Chizimuli Fisheries
- Forestry Research Institute
- Assistance to the Forestry Department
- Biological Control of Aphids
- Macadamia Nut Research
- Tea Research
- Estates Extension Service
- Water Hyacinth Control
- CTVM/DAHI Veterinary Project
- Livestock Disease Evaluation

Education
- Technical Colleges
- Distance Education College
- Secondary School Teachers
- University of Malawi (Civil and Mechanical Engineering Faculties)

Computer Science
Data Processing

Health
College of Medicine
Onchocerciasis Research
Contraceptive Commodities

Transport
Malawi Railways Phase II
Nacala Emergency Support
Lilongwe—Salima Road
Chilumba/Dwongwa Porels
Landrover Rehabilitation Phase III

Water
Blantyre Water Board
Lilongwe Water Board
Districts Water Appraisal

Miscellaneous
Malawi Law Reports
Assistance to City Councils
Ministry of Community Services
Social Dimensions of Adjustment

Programme Aid Agreements:-
1989 Programme Aid Grant
1990 Programme Aid Grant
1991 Programme Aid Grant (pending signature)

"World Rainforest Report"

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain for the library of the Overseas Development Administration a subscription to the "World Rainforest Report", published by the World Rainforest Movement.

Mrs. Chalker: The library of the Overseas Development Administration already subscribes to this publication.

Environmental Appraisal

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many copies of the Overseas Development Administration's manual of environmental appraisal have been produced; and to which organisations the manual has been distributed.

Mrs. Chalker *[holding answer 14 February 1992]:* More than 1,800 copies of the manual have been produced; a list of the organisations the manual has been distributed to has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Energy Grants

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what grants have been made by his Department's Overseas Development Administration since 1979 to support (i) energy efficiency, (ii) nuclear power and (iii) pollution abatement in industrially developing nations.

Mrs. Chalker *[holding answer 14 February 1992]:* I have placed in the Libraries of the House lists of grants funded by the Overseas Development Administration from 1980 to 1990 in the fields of energy efficiency and pollution abatement. No grants in the nuclear power sector were made. Records available, which cover capital grants for the whole period and technical co-operation grants from 1988 only, show that during the period a total of approximately £26 million has been spent on pollution abatement projects and approximately £234 million on energy efficiency-related projects.

HEALTH

Ear, Nose and Throat Operations

13. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in reducing the waiting time for ear, nose and throat operations in the past 12 months.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The latest information shows that in the year to March 1991 the number of patients waiting over two years for ENT treatments fell by 50 per cent. and the number waiting over one year by 24 per cent.

Extra-contractual Referrals

15. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the system of extra-contractual referrals as a means of ensuring patient choice and general practitioner freedom of referral.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am satisfied that extra contractual referrals are working effectively in dealing with smaller patient flows. Expenditure on extra contractual referrals is running in line with plan.

Hilda Lewis House

16. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had about the proposed closure of Hilda Lewis house; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Bethlem Royal hospital and the Maudsley hospital special health authority has decided to restructure the services for children with both learning difficulties and behavioural problems which it currently provides at Hilda Lewis house. This will better enable the authority to fulfil its key role in postgraduate research and teaching. The authority is best placed to make this kind of decision about its strategic priorities, which it has also discussed with the NHS management executive.

Bloomsbury and Islington Health Authority

17. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning possible trust status for any part of the Bloomsbury and Islington health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: We have received an expression of interest in trust status from April 1993 from the Whittington and Royal Northern hospitals. We have received an application from the Royal London homoeopathic hospital, which is resubmitting from the second wave. We have also received an expression of interest from St. Peter's, St. Paul's, St. Philip's and the Shaftesbury hospitals, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not approved to make an application.

Patients Charter

18. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what waiting list targets have been set under the patients charter.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: From 1 April 1992, the patients charter guarantees that no patient will wait more

than two years for treatment. The charter also requires health authorities to set and publish clear local standards for waiting time for first out-patient appointments.

National Health Service Trusts

19. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress by national health service hospital trusts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Recently my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that 99 hospitals and other units will be established in the second wave of national health service trusts in April 1992, while four London teaching hospitals will become operational as trusts in April 1993.

To date, 153 hospitals and other units have indicated that they may apply to become trusts in April 1993. If all these were to be successful, two thirds of national health service hospitals and other units would be operating as national health service trusts.

First-wave national health service trusts across the country have already made significant improvements in the care they can offer their patients.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in the first wave of trust hospitals how many executive directors were appointed following advertisements and competitive interviews and how many were appointed without competition; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally. The appointment of executive directors is a matter for the National Health Service Trust Board in accordance with the National Health Service Trusts (Membership and Procedure) Regulations and the Department's guidance which states that the post of chief executive must be advertised except when the trust is first established.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been his Department's total expenditure to date on the introduction of national health service trusts.

Mr. Dorrell: Figures are not available, but the cost is not significant and will be more than offset by the improvements in efficiency in delivering the service.

General Practitioner Contracts

20. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the general practitioner contract.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The general practitioner contract has revolutionised primary health care. As a direct result of this initiative, general practitioners all over the country now offer patients a wider range of services than ever before and patient satisfaction levels are high.

Surgeries now offer more preventive care and give special emphasis to vulnerable patients like young children and the elderly.

These improvements amply illustrate the very positive impact of the general practitioner contract, and the Government's commitment to improving the health of the whole population.

Pain Relief

21. **Mr. Ashley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to improve and extend the relief of pain.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The provision of services for the diagnosis and relief of pain is a matter for individual health authorities to determine.

Electoral Registration

22. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the total number of electors registered for England and Wales for 1992-93; and what is the equivalent relevant population of those who are entitled to register.

Mr. Dorrell: The size of the 1992 electoral register is not yet known. It is estimated that there were about 40·4 million residents of England and Wales at mid-1991 old enough to be included on this register.

Mersey RHA

23. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to meet the chairman of the Mersey regional health authority to discuss changes planned in national health service provision.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State meets regional chairmen on a regular basis. A wide range of topics on the national health service are discussed at these meetings.

Social Services

24. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response he intends to make to the policy forum report on spending on social services.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Local authorities have a challenging job to provide services which are flexible, comprehensive and sensitive to the needs of users and carers. Our record which has seen personal social services spending increase by nearly 60 per cent. in real terms since 1978-79 shows that we are committed to providing local authorities with the resources to do so.

NHS Charges

25. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to health authorities regarding the imposition of charges on NHS patients.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: National health services must be free except where charging is expressly provided for by legislation. The chief executive reminded health service managers of this on 24 October 1991.

GP Lists

26. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average number of patients on each general practitioner's list *(a)* in 1978 and *(b)* in 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The average list size fell from 2,312 in October 1978 to 1,942 in October 1990—a reduction of 16 per cent.

The latest available information held centrally shows that the average list size at 1 April 1991 was 1,917, a further reduction of 1·3 per cent.

GP Fund Holders

27. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what independent reports have been issued about the progress of general practitioner fund holding.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Kings Fund report on GP fund holding—"A Foothold for Fundholding"—was published on 11 February and a copy is available in the Library. We welcome this first piece of independent, academic research undertaken by Professor Howard Glennerster of the London School of Economics which shows that GP fund holding is proving to be a clear success and, most importantly, working to the benefit of patients.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *668*, what proportion of the general practitioner fund holders' budget for hospital services is spent outside the NHS.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

Organ Retrievals

29. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the United Kingdom transplant authority and regional health authorities about improving organ retrieval rates.

Mr. Dorrell: We are constantly looking at ways to improve organ retrieval rates through our regular contacts with people from a wide range of interested bodies including health authorities and the United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State discussed this issue during a recent visit to the UKTSSA.

Waiting Lists

28. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what actions have been announced under the waiting list initiative.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have made four announcements which have given fresh impetus to our continued drive to reduce long waiting time.

First, at the start of the financial year, I announced a waiting list fund of £35 million to be used to help health authorities reduce long waiting times. A proportion of this money has been targeted at the 80 worst lists.

Secondly, in October last year, I announced publication of the patients charter, which, for the first time, gives patients a guarantee that, from 1 April 1992, they will not wait more than two years for treatment.

Thirdly, on 3 December, I announced the appointment of an experienced NHS general manager, backed by an additional £2 million, to help health authorities eliminate over two year waiters. Since then we have been able to provide a further £2 million, bringing the total waiting list fund this year to £39 million.

Finally, on 10 February, I announced that we would be providing a further £39 million waiting list fund for next year, taking the total which the Government will have provided between 1987-88 and 1992-93 to nearly £200 million.

30. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about hospital waiting lists in the northern area.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Waiting times in the northern region continue to fall. The latest provisional figures show that since March 1991 the number of patients waiting over two years has fallen by 60 per cent. and the number waiting over one year by 15 per cent. In line with the patients charter, the region expects to have no patient waiting over two years by 31 March 1992.

Disabled People (Legislation)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress in implementing the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Most of the major provisions of the Act have now been implemented, bringing substantial benefits to disabled people and their carers.

Northern General Hospital (Red Alerts)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in how many cases during the month of January was there a red alert in the Northern general hospital.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Beverley Stokes, the chairman of the Northern general hospital national health service trust, for details.

National Health Service

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what are the existing requirements to provide evidence of entitlement to hospital treatment under the national health service to prevent fraudulent applications by foreign nationals and others who have not contributed financially by means of national health insurance payments; if he will review the effectiveness and fairness of the present arrangements; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what information is a prospective patient required to supply when seeking hospital treatment under the national health service to satisfy the admission staff that he or she is entitled to treatment free at the point of delivery.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Eligibility to free hospital treatment is based on residence in the United Kingdom, not on the payment of national insurance contributions or taxes. Anyone not ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom has to pay for national health service hospital treatment unless he or she is covered by one of a number of specific exemptions.

Guidance issued by the Department makes it clear that, when there is doubt about eligibility, hospital staff should ask for evidence to support a claim to exemption from charging. The information prospective patients are required to supply will vary according to the type of exemption that applies.

Health Authorities (Non-executive Directors)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many chairmen and non-executive directors of district health authorities and family health service authorities do not reside within the boundaries of the authorities to which they have been appointed; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally. We seek to appoint all chairmen of district

health authorities and family health services authorities who live or work in the area covered by the authority to which they have been appointed.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what payments may be made to non-executive directors of health authorities, family health services authorities and hospital trusts in addition to the annual remuneration of £5,000; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The non-executives of NHS authorities and trusts are entitled to travelling and subsistence expenses in addition to annual remuneration of £5,000.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the differences between the responsibilities of the members of district health authorities and family health service authorities prior to appointment of the non-executive directors and those who currently hold office; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Non-executives of the new, streamlined authorities are part of a smaller management board which focuses on issues of overall strategy, policy and direction.

Cervical Smears

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average time taken by laboratories to process cervical smears; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information is not available in the form requested. Health authorities must aim to return the results of cervical smear tests to the doctor who undertook them within one month. In December 1990 about two thirds of health authorities were meeting the one month target. As at December 1991, the latest available date, more than 96 per cent. of health authorities were meeting this target. The average processing time in those districts which were failing to meet this target was six weeks.

Childhood Vaccination

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many yellow card reports of an adverse reaction to childhood vaccination or immunisation were received in the last year for which figures are available; and how many children died.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In 1991 there were 483 reports of suspected adverse reactions in association with immunisation of children up to the age of 16. A report of a suspected adverse reaction does not necessarily imply a causal association between the reaction, the outcome and the vaccine. Nine of those reports were deaths: research from several recent studies has shown such deaths to be temporally but not causally related to immunisation.

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated annual cost of the cervical cancer screening programme.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There is no reliable current estimate of the annual cost of the cervical screening programme. The cervical screening programme is an integral part of NHS disease prevention activity and the time and resources used to take and process smears cannot be separately identified. Payments made to GPs in connection with the target payment scheme for cervical screening are provisionally estimated to be £48·9 million in England in 1990-91.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated annual cost of the breast screening programme.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government allocated £55 million for England—£70 million for the United Kingdom—between 1987-88 and 1990-91 to establish the breast screening programme and to contribute towards ongoing costs. In 1990-91 running costs for the breast screening programme amounted to £24 million in England. In 1991-92 the running costs are estimated to be £24·5 million in England.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish figures for each district health authority showing their revenue and capital allocations for NHS review expenditure in 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish table 3 of Cm 1913 adjusted for input unit costs.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested for the hospital and community health services—HCHS—family health services and for the health service as a whole for the years 1986-87 and 1990-91 is given in the table. Information is not available in this form for other parts of the programme or for later years.

This information measures changes in total inputs at constant factor cost but ignores the continuing success of the national health service in increasing the efficiency with which it uses resources. Therefore, in order to give a complete picture, figures adjusted by the GDP deflator have also been included.

Since it has not been possible to adjust these figures for certain review-related changes, figures for 1991-92 onwards are not directly comparable with those for earlier years. The main points are:

i. Sums provided for trust debt remuneration are included in HCHS current in 1991-92 and 1992-93;
ii. Trusts' capital financed via health authorities' payments for services is included in HCHS current for 1991-92 and 1992-93;
iii. GP fund holders' expenditure on drugs is included in HCHS current in 1991-92 only.

Further explanation is given in paragraph 3.4 of the departmental report and other tables, for example, table 9 which gives the full picture of HCHS capital spending.

Expenditure figures as they appear in table 3 of Cm 1913 adjusted for changes in input unit costs and by the GDP deflator (all at 1990-91 prices)

£ million

	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
NHS hospital, community health, family health (cash limited) and related services:							
Current expenditure							
Adjusted for change in input unit cost							
Gross	14,977	15,251	15,311	15,329	16,081	[1]—	[1]—
Net	14,540	14,818	14,876	14,873	15,590	[1]—	[1]—
Adjusted by GDP deflator							
Gross	14,178	14,857	15,377	15,483	16,081	17,098	18,091
Net	13,764	14,434	14,940	15,022	15,590	16,643	17,678
Capital expenditure							
Adjusted for change in input unit cost							
Gross	1,423	1,425	1,450	1,591	1,555	[1]—	[1]—
Net	1,221	1,166	1,110	1,332	1,377	[1]—	[1]—
Adjusted by the GDP deflator							
Gross	1,372	1,369	1,376	1,548	1,555	1,536	1,368
Net	1,178	1,121	1,054	1,296	1,377	1,338	1,189
NHS family health services (non cash limited) current/total expenditure							
Adjusted for change in input unit cost							
Gross	5,146	5,323	5,489	5,470	5,304	[1]—	[1]—
Net	4,593	4,763	4,891	4,807	4,690	[1]—	[1]—
Adjusted by the GDP deflator							
Gross	4,740	4,976	5,261	5,219	5,304	5,424	5,567
Net	4,231	4,452	4,688	4,587	4,690	4,805	4,930
Total health services							
Current expenditure							
Adjusted for change in input unit cost							
Gross	20,777	21,223	21,400	21,436	22,017	[1]—	[1]—
Net	19,774	20,218	20,364	20,317	20,889	[1]—	[1]—
Adjusted by the GDP deflator							
Gross	19,524	20,446	21,216	21,314	22,017	23,239	24,395
Net	18,581	19,477	20,189	20,201	20,889	22,136	23,313
Capital expenditure							
Adjusted for change in input unit cost							
Gross	1,474	1,454	1,487	1,621	1,603	[1]—	[1]—
Net	1,273	1,193	1,121	1,361	1,425	[1]—	[1]—
Adjusted by the GDP deflator							
Gross	1,422	1,398	1,411	1,577	1,603	1,621	1,529
Net	1,227	1,147	1,064	1,325	1,425	1,423	1,350
Total expenditure							
Adjusted for change in input unit cost							
Gross	22,271	22,696	22,908	23,064	23,620	[1]—	[1]—
Net	21,061	21,429	21,517	21,688	22,314	[1]—	[1]—
Adjusted by the GDP deflator							
Gross	20,945	21,843	22,628	22,891	23,620	24,860	25,924
Net	19,808	20,624	21,253	21,526	22,314	23,559	24,663

[1]— Estimates are not made for changes in input unit cost until the financial year has ended.

Dentistry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of courses of treatment for adults by the general dental services in each year since 1978-79.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of adult courses of treatment in the general dental services 1978 to 1991-92[1] England

Year	Adult courses of treatment
1978	17,021,610
1979	17,351,250
1980	18,599,830
1981	18,975,130
1982	19,724,540
1983	20,316,210
1984	20,864,560
1985-86	21,338,100
1986-87	21,961,680
1987-88	22,394,600
1988-89	24,026,520
1989-90	22,809,160
1990-91	22,539,686
1991-92[2]	23,400,000

[1] Prior to 1985-86 information was held by calendar year.
[2] Forecast for the year based on data up to the end of January 1992.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase national health service prescription charges.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) on 13 February, at columns *603-4*.

Private Care Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what instructions were given to health authority inspection and registration officers with regard to their role in *(a)* monitoring whether residents in private nursing homes require such care and are also receiving it, and *(b)* liaison with Benefits Agency staff concerning the circumstances of those residents in receipt of income support payments towards their care home fee.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Under the Registered Homes Act 1984, health authorities have a general duty to ensure that the level of care provided is sufficient to meet the needs of individual patients.

Geriatric Patients

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest estimate for the average weekly cost per patient of geriatric in-patient care.

Mr. Dorrell: Financial returns submitted to the Department by district health authorities in England for 1990-91 indicate the average treatment cost per geriatric in-patient to be £53 per day. This figure excludes the cost of support services and accommodation, and is provisional at this stage.

School Nurses and Health Visitors

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each of the last five years for each NHS region the number of *(a)* school nurses and *(b)* health visitors.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 7 February 1992]:* The information requested is shown in the tables. The fluctuations in numbers reflects the substantial growth in family practitioner services. The number of general practitioners has increased by 20 per cent. since 1979. The wider range of primary care services available to children and their parents has led many health authorities to review the role of their community child health services and redirect resources towards children with special needs.

National Health Service health visitors[1] [4] as at 30 September for each year
England by regional health authorities

Whole-time equivalent[2]

Region	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Northern Regional Health Authority	690	680	700	690	690
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority	740	800	810	840	820
Trent Regional Health Authority	960	960	950	990	1,010
East Anglia Regional Health Authority	370	380	380	390	360
North West Thames Regional Health Authority	810	810	790	800	790
North East Thames Regional Health Authority	740	770	720	740	770
South East Thames Regional Health Authority	830	760	770	[3]340	750
South West Thames Regional Health Authority	640	640	650	650	650
Wessex Regional Health Authority	610	590	600	610	640
Oxford Regional Health Authority	560	570	560	570	560
South Western Regional Health Authority	680	700	680	640	690
West Midlands Regional Health Authority	1,120	1,110	1,070	1,130	1,100
Mersey Regional Health Authority	500	500	520	550	520
North Western Regional Health Authority	1,170	1,100	1,120	1,120	1,120
ENGLAND TOTAL	10,430	10,360	10,340	[3]10,050	10,470

Source: Department of Health (SM13) annual census of National Health Service non-medical manpower.

[1] Excludes senior nurses grades I to 8 in Health Visiting service, including Health Visitors, Health Visitor field work teachers, school Health Visitors, TB Visitors with Health Visitor certificates, Bank Health Visitors and dual/triple posts (HV/DN/MID). From 1989 includes clinical grades G to I in Health Visiting. Excludes Health Visitor students.

[2] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalent.

[3] Understated figures due to errors in occupation coding at South East Thames region.

[4] Health Visitors are defined by occupation code. Apparent changes in staffing levels may well be the result of changes in coding accuracy.

National Health Service school nurses[1] [3] as at 30 September for each year
England by regional health authorities

Whole-time equivalent[2]

Region	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Northern Regional Health Authority	220	220	220	210	200
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority	190	200	200	200	190
Trent Regional Health Authority	340	320	300	310	290
East Anglia Regional Health Authority	70	80	80	90	90
North West Thames Regional Health Authority	200	200	210	210	210
North East Thames Regional Health Authority	170	210	230	230	230
South East Thames Regional Health Authority	210	190	140	[4]120	200
South West Thames Regional Health Authority	150	140	140	130	120
Wessex Regional Health Authority	120	120	120	120	120
Oxford Regional Health Authority	100	110	110	120	120
South Western Regional Health Authority	140	150	140	120	120
West Midlands Regional Health Authority	310	320	320	330	330

Region	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Mersey Regional Health Authority	210	210	200	190	190
North Western Regional Health Authority	300	250	260	230	240
ENGLAND TOTAL	2,730	2,720	2,650	*2,590	2,660

Source: Department of Health (SM13) annual census of National Health Service non-medical manpower.

[1] Excludes special school and school Health Visitors.
[2] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalent.
[3] School nurses are defined by occupation code. Apparent changes in staffing levels may well be the result of changes in coding accuracy.
[4] Understated figures due to errors in occupation coding at South East Thames region.

SOCIAL SECURITY

HIV

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how payments for persons infected with HIV as a result of an NHS blood transfusion or tissue transfer will be treated for the purposes of social security benefits; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: They will be treated in the same way as payments made to haemophiliacs under the Macfarlane Trusts. That is to say, they will be fully disregarded in the income-related benefits and exempted from the scheme to recover sums equivalent to the value of social security benefits from compensation payments. The confidentiality of beneficiaries will also be protected by making it unnecessary for them to report the receipt of any payment to a social security office or a local authority.

We will introduce the necessary amending regulations as soon as possible.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Assisted Places

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average annual cost of maintaining a pupil in a private school under the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Fallon: The average cost to the Exchequer of an assisted place in the school year 1990-91, the latest year for which complete information is available, was £2,691.

Secondary Education

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his estimate of the 1991-92 cost to public funds of the education of a pupil in a local authority secondary school and in a secondary school which has opted out of local authority control.

Mr. Eggar: The funding of grant-maintained schools comprises a number of elements. The largest element, annual maintenance grant (AMG), broadly reflects the recurrent funds which the former maintaining local education authority of the school would have deployed in support of the school had it remained local education authority-maintained. Other grants to grant-maintained schools reflect the types of provision which local education authority schools receive in cash or in kind.

Student Loans

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will indicate the reasons for the variation in the provision for access funds in 1993-94 and 1994-95, relative to 1992-93, in table 1 of his departmental report on the Government's expenditure plans, Cm 1911.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The figures in the departmental report are based on the initial planned GB provision for access funds of some £15 million each year. Provision for the years 1990-91 to 1992-93 was subsequently increased. Provision for 1993-94 and 1994-95 will be reviewed in this year's public expenditure survey.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the assumptions on which the projected expenditure on student loans for 1992-93, 1993-94 and 1994-95 are based in table 1 of his departmental report on the Government's expenditure plans, Cm 1911.

Mr. Alan Howarth: As the departmental report makes clear, student loans will continue to be available for all eligible students who apply for them. The level of expenditure on loans will depend on the level of demand and the rates and conditions of loans prescribed in the statutory regulations for each year.

Table 1 in Cm 1911 sets out planned public expenditure provision for the years 1992-93, 1993-94 and 1994-95. The plans for future years will be reviewed in successive public expenditure surveys. The assumptions underlying the figures in table 1 include the following:

(i) Average student support from basic maintenance grant (disregarding any parental contribution) and loan will rise in line with the GDP deflator assumptions for the years in question;

(ii) The number of students eligible for loans will rise in line with the projected increase in the number of mandatory award holders, as shown in table 20 of the departmental report;

(iii) Take-up of the available loan facility will be 35 per cent. in each of the academic years 1991-92 and 1992-93, 45 per cent. in the academic year 1993-94 and 55 per cent. in the academic year 1994-95. Take-up in the academic year 1990-91 was some 28 per cent.;

(iv) 10 per cent. of borrowers will not have to repay their loans, because their income will never reach the deferment threshold; and

(v) 10 per cent. of the remaining 90 per cent. of borrowers will not repay their loans because they default or because their liability is cancelled on death. This is a cautious planning assumption. The Student Loans Company will pursue defaulters vigorously.

Experience in the academic year 1990-91 demonstrated how difficult it is to predict exactly what the ultimate level of take-up will be. If the above assumptions over-estimate demand, any excess provision will be surrendered to the Consolidated Fund. If, on the other hand, demand exceeds the level of provision, additional funds will be provided from the reserve. The reserve is the amount within the planning total which provides a margin for uncertainties or—as in this case—for revised estimates of demand.

Key Stage 1 Assessment

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the cost of the two-year evaluation of key stage 1 assessment, undertaken by the university of Leeds; and if he will publish the reports of the evaluation.

Mr. Eggar: The cost of this work has been £512,000 to December 1991. The School Examinations and Assessment Council will publish a final report shortly.

Teachers' Pensions Agency

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has made a decision on the establishment of the teachers' pensions agency under the "next steps" initiative.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have decided to establish the teachers' pensions agency with effect from 1 April 1992. The agency will be located in Darlington.

A framework document setting out the organisational, financial and management structure under which the agency will operate will be published at that time. The performance targets which I will set the agency will also be published.

Circular 22/89

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he plans to issue the addendum to circular 22/89.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend expects to issue the addendum to circular 22/89 in the near future.

Teaching Staff, Northumberland

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number of *(a)* teachers, *(b)* non-teaching and staff and *(c)* administrative staff employed in Northumberland county council.

Mr. Fallon: The number of teachers employed in nursery, primary and secondary schools in Northumberland education authority in January 1991 was 2,736. Data on education support staff and administrative staff employed in schools were collected for the first time in January 1991 but are not yet available for publication. Information on other categories of non-teaching staff in schools is not collected centrally. The Department does not collect data on administrative staff employed in Northumberland county council.

Basic Need Criteria

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish the Department's criteria which *(a)* a secondary school and *(b)* a primary school has to meet in order to qualify as a basic need case.

Mr. Fallon: Basic need is defined as the net deficit of places after account is taken of demand for, and places available, in all maintained primary schools within two miles and all maintained secondary schools within three miles, of the school at which it is intended that new places be added.

This was set out in full in my Department's letter of 30 May 1991, which invited LEAs to bid for annual capital guidelines and voluntary school capital allocations. That letter and a subsequent letter of 19 August 1991 made clear that basic need bids in 1992-93 should be for deficits of places in 1994-95 in primary schools and 1995-96 in secondary schools. It was also made clear that in assessing the availability of places in neighbouring schools, LEAs' calculations should be based on whichever was the higher of the schools' capacity or their numbers on roll in September 1992.

We are currently reviewing our basic need definitions, as we do each year in advance of the publication of the capital bidding letter. We shall take account of representations received on our methodology from LEAs and others. We have also announced that we are consulting local authority associations, voluntary bodies and grant-maintained schools on a change in our capital allocations methodology which would allow popular schools to expand notwithstanding the existence of spare places in other maintained schools in the area.

DNA Research

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide not less than an extra £2 million per year for the Medical Research Council to cover the British contribution to the second stage of sequencing the DNA of the nematode Caenorhabditis Elegas.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend and I are in touch with the chairman and secretary of the council on this issue. In this financial year the allocation to the council from this Department's science budget will total almost £203 million. The 1992-93 allocations announced in December will raise that sum to almost £219 million, excluding money transferred from the universities following changes in the dual support arrangements. This represents a 4 per cent. real terms increase on this year's funding and a 32 per cent. increase since 1979-80. It is for the council to decide on the deployment of these funds.

EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were registered as unemployed on *(a)* 1 January 1987 and *(b)* 1 January in the current year.

Mr. Jackson: In January 1987, on the consistent seasonally adjusted basis, there were 3,042,600 unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom, compared with 2,604,100 in January 1992—a fall of 438,500, or 14 per cent.

Training Costs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has *(a)* to extend his proposals for new employers to obtain redress in respect of training investment by employees' previous employers to situations where companies are purchased by companies owned by foreign governments and *(b)* to apply the proposals retrospectively.

Mr. Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) on 14 February 1992 at column *652-53*.

Jobs and Benefits Centre, Thornaby

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress is being made with the provision of a new integrated jobs and benefits centre in Thornaby; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Strikes

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the average number of days lost through strikes each year between 1974 and 1979 and between 1986 and 1991.

Mr. Forth: There were an average of 12·2 million working days lost each year between 1974 and 1979. That is nearly five times higher than the annual average between 1986 and 1991, which was 2·7 million days lost.

Training Allowances

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people are currently on youth training places; what are the current rates of allowances paid to 16 and 17-year-olds; when those rates were last increased; and what would be the value in 1992 prices of the original level of allowance paid in 1978.

Mr. Jackson: At 5 January 1992, the latest date for which information is available, it is estimated that there were 270,600 young people on youth training in England and Wales. The current minimum levels of the training allowance are £29·50 per week for 16-year-olds, and £35 per week for 17-year-olds. Those minimum levels of allowance were introduced in July 1988 and April 1986 respectively. Employers are strongly encouraged to supplement those allowances, and many of them do—and around one third of trainees are employed and receive a wage. The value of the original level of allowance payable in 1978 at 1992 prices is £52·89 per week.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to improve the level of training allowances for youth training.

Mr. Jackson: The Department has no plans at present to increase minimum levels of the youth training allowance. We believe that the existing minimum levels are sufficient to meet the normal requirements of a young person living in the parental home. Trainees living independently are free to apply for income support over and above youth training minimum allowances if they consider that their income is insufficient to meet their needs. Employers, as the beneficiaries of YT, are encouraged to supplement trainee incomes. Around one third of trainees are employed and receive a wage.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

BT Engineer's Responsibilities

Mr. Mullin: To ask the chairman of the Administration Committee if he will list the responsibilities of the British Telecom engineer based at 3 Deans yard.

Mr. Orme: I shall ask the Serjeant at Arms to write to the hon. Member.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Deregulation Initiative

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the progress of the deregulation initiative.

Mr. Redwood: The deregulation initiative ensures close scrutiny of new and existing regulation and of compliance costs for business. Minimising the cost of regulation for business remains central to the Government's programme to create the conditions to promote prosperity.

In the past 12 months, Government Departments have targeted attention on certain outdated or burdensome requirements which business has identified as causing difficulty. This has yielded a number of improvements in the regulatory environment. Further requirements have been targeted for attention in the 12 months ahead.

The central deregulation unit in my Department continues to support the initiative as a whole by taking the lead on certain general issues, and by continuing to work with business to identify regulatory burdens and to co-operate with Departments to achieve good deregulatory outcomes on particular issues.

The programme of work includes action in the following areas:

Continuing development and evaluation of disciplines and techniques for assessing compliance costs to business and securing good regulatory practice across Whitehall (Deregulation Unit, Department of Trade and Industry and other Government Departments)

New

—to prepare guidance and training on good regulatory practice for use in Departments of State (Deregulation Unit)

—to begin a three year review programme of all existing Central Statistical Office enquiries (Central Statistical Office)

Promotion of good regulatory practice in the European Community (Deregulation Unit, Department of Trade and Industry)

Ongoing

—to improve evaluation of EC legislation in compliance with the Maastricht declaration, including pressing for better compliance cost assessment and earlier and more comprehensive consultation of business (Deregulation Unit, Department of Trade and Industry and other Government Departments)

—to mobilise business and official opinion in other Member States (Deregulation Unit, Department of Trade and Industry)

Local authority regulation of business

Ongoing

—to evaluate local authority enforcement of regulation

—to improve consistency of practice by local authority enforcement officers (Deregulation Unit, Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Environment and other Departments)

The administration of rules affecting the workplace, employment conditions, PAYE, national insurance

Completed

to implement the deregulation review of PAYE communications with employers (Inland Revenue)

to consider the need for new information on flexible working arrangements, make recommendations and present a draft leaflet to Ministers (Department of Employment and Other Government Departments)

to prepare a booklet for employers on the benefits of a flexible approach to working arrangements, including information about setting up workplace creches (Department of Employment)

to reduce the burden on employers of Community Charge Attachment of Earnings Orders (Department of Environment)

Substantial progress

to explore scope for eliminating some of the differences in definitions of earnings and expenses for PAYE and NIC purposes firstly by reviewing administrative solutions (Department of Social Security and Inland Revenue)

to review procedures for allowing NI contributors who have proven need for NI exception in one or more (self) employments to renew their exception certificate every two or three years instead of annually (Department of Social Security)

to continue implementation programme of recommendations arising from the deregulation review of P11D procedures (Inland Revenue)

New

to simplify the payment system for the self-employed (NI Class 2) (Department of Social Security)

to ensure that measures to implement the EC Framework Directive on health and safety in the workplace minimise the burden on business as far as possible (Health and Safety Executive and Deregulation Unit)

The regime for small businesses

Substantial progress

to reduce reporting requirements for small company accounts (Department of Trade and Industry and Inland Revenue)

Ongoing

to complete study of new forms of incorporation (Department of Trade and Industry)

New

to review audit and accounting requirements for very small companies (Department of Trade and Industry, Inland Revenue, HM Treasury and Department of Employment)

Investment & Financial Services

Substantial progress

to simplify requirements for company prospectuses (Department of Trade and Industry)

to continue to simplify the operation of the Financial Services Act and, in particular, to seek ways of minimising the burden of regulation on professionals (Department of Trade and Industry)

Indirect taxation

Completed

to examine the problems caused for business by the requirements of the VAT retail schemes and improve and simplify their operation (HM Customs and Excise)

New

to review registration/licensing requirements for those businesses controlled by HM Customs and Excise as excise and inland customs traders (HM Customs and Excise)

to review HM Customs and Excise's public guidance for those businesses they control as excise and inland customs traders (HM Customs and Excise)

Planning

Ongoing

to simplify the procedures for designating Simplified Planning Zones (Department of Environment)

Data Protection

Ongoing

to follow up inter-departmental working party report on the Data Protection Act to reduce in particular burdens of registration (Home Office)

Trade Marks

Ongoing

to overhaul existing legislation and implement an EC directive on trade marks (Department of Trade and Industry)

Specific controls affecting certain types of business

Completed

to exempt vehicles from national type approval requirements to permit use on public roads for testing and publicity purposes prior to the completion of the whole vehicle inspection (Department of Transport)

to delegate to classification societies the approval of stability information for mobile offshore drilling units and ships which are mobile offshore support units (Department of Transport)

to review the effectiveness of the system of on-shore petroleum licensing (Department of Energy)

Substantial progress

to rationalise the system of consents and licences from different authorities to work in tidal waters and designated areas of the Continental Shelf (Department of Transport)

Ongoing

to identify at least 20 business licences which should be abolished (Deregulation Unit and Government Departments)

to review evening opening of betting offices (Home Office)

to ensure food safety controls on food producers and retailers are proportionate to the problem (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and Department of Health)

New

to review licensing controls on taxis and passenger hire vehicles (Department of Transport)

to simplify the system of HGV and PSV vehicle operator licensing (Department of Transport)

to review fertiliser standards (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food)

to review legislation for control of sheep scab (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food)

to review feedingstuffs standards (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food)

to increase the permitted size of large multidisciplinary partnerships in certain professions (Department of Trade and Industry)

to reduce disclosure provisions for directors of investment trust savings schemes (Department of Trade and Industry)

to exempt certain low power radio devices from licensing (Department of Trade and Industry)

to clarify application procedures for DTI innovation assistance schemes (Department of Trade and Industry)

International trade and exports

Substantial progress

to review procedures for issuing E101 certificates for people working abroad (Department of Social Security)

Ongoing

to improve immigration procedures at London airports to reduce delays to business people and other bona fide travellers (Home Office)

to continue to streamline export licensing procedures (Department of Trade and Industry)

New

to streamline the implementation of controls on intra-Community trade in industrial dual-use and nuclear goods (Department of Trade and Industry)

Fairs and Promotions

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what use has been made of his Department's ready reckoner for staff and related costs in considering proposed staff reductions in the fairs and promotions branch of his Department.

Mr. Sainsbury: Ready reckoner data have been taken fully into account in considering staff reductions.

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when he received a draft of the Price Waterhouse report on the future of the fairs and promotions branch in his Department; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will hold a period of consultation with affected staff in his Department after the publication of the Price Waterhouse report on the future of the fairs and promotions branch.

Mr. Sainsbury: Price Waterhouse is not involved in reporting on the future of the fairs and promotions branch.

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the number of reviews of the work of the fairs and promotions branch in his Department since 1979, the objectives of the reviews and their results.

Mr. Sainsbury: Over the period there have been 13 reviews into different aspects of the schemes and operations of the fairs and promotions branch resulting in various changes in policy and procedures. These have been notified, as appropriate, to industry and commerce.

Accounts Services Executive Agency

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the maximum salary payable to the chief executive of the Accounts Services executive agency, including peformance-related element, and the length of time of the chief executive's contract.

Mr. Leigh: The maximum salary payable to the chief executive is at present determined by reference to the standard grade 5 range on which he is paid. The range is £36,178 to £47,921, excluding London weighting, in London and £34,667 to £46,122 elsewhere. The term of the appointment is five years.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will list those new facilities for staff, including nurseries and health-care schemes, which have been introduced in the Accounts Services executive agency since its establishment;

(2) if he will list the new forms of alternative working patterns introduced into the Accounts Services executive agency since its establishment; and if he will provide a breakdown by grade of the numbers of staff taking up each new working pattern.

Mr. Leigh: These are operational matters for the agency's chief executive. I have, therefore, asked him to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was spent on events and publicity surrounding the launch of the Accounts Services executive agency; and whether the cost was borne by the parent department or the new agency.

Mr. Leigh: The launch of the agency was an operational matter for its chief executive. I have therefore asked him to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the quality-of-service performance indicators adopted by the Accounts Services executive agency since its establishment; and if he will identify separately those quality-of-service performance indicators already operative prior to the agency status.

Mr. Leigh: The agency's chief executive and his managers set and monitor their own internal management targets for performance, including quality of service measures. However, a distinctive feature of next steps has been the setting by Ministers, and a formal announcement, of targets for agencies, and publication of details of their subsequent performance.

For details of these ministerial targets for the Accounts Service executive agency I refer the hon. Member to the announcement made to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 15 October 1991, *Official Report*, column *128*.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the first degree obtained by the chief executive of the Accounts Services executive agency; and from which university or polytechnic it was awarded.

Mr. Leigh: This question seeks personal information about an individual. I have therefore drawn it to the attention of the chief executive of the agency.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will state the cash amount per person awarded in the last year for which figures were available, and the conditions attached to its award, of the group bonus scheme operated by the Accounts Services executive agency.

Mr. Leigh: The agency has not yet introduced a group bonus scheme.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the last annual report for the Accounts Services executive agency was published; and when the next one is due.

Mr. Leigh: The first annual report for the agency is expected to be published in summer 1992.

Mr. McAllion : To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff were in post on the date that the Accounts Services executive agency was established; and how many are in post now.

Mr. Leigh: The numbers of staff in post on 1 October 1991, the date when the agency was established, and on 1 February 1992, were 91·5 and 89·5 respectively. These numbers represent permanent staff with part-timers counted as half. Casuals are excluded.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the post, grade and maximum salary payable, including performance-related elements, in each case where appointments have been made to the Accounts Services executive agency at grade 7 or above since its establishment.

Mr. Leigh: Of the four posts in the Accounts Services agency at grade 7 and above, one has been the subject of an appointment since its establishment. This is a grade 7 post filled by a transfer from within the Department. The maximum salary payable is determined by reference to the grade 7 pay scale. this is £24,379 to £34,667, excluding London weighting, in London and £23,329 to £33,175 elsewhere.

Short Measure Beer

Sir Charles Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Chelmsford, (Mr. Burns) on 20 December 1991, at column *387*, if he will list for each of the last three years *(a)* the number of complaints which his Department has received from members of the public regarding short measure beer and *(b)* the local authority trading standards departments which have submitted reports to his Department regarding short measure beer.

Mr. Leigh: My Department received three complaints from members of the public in 1989, six in 1990 and 23 in 1991. The trading standards departments which have submitted reports are Barnsley in 1989; Bedfordshire, Tayside and South Tyneside in 1990; and Surrey, Greater Manchester, St. Helens and North Yorkshire in 1991.

Funeral Costs

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce proposals for legislation to require all funeral directors to publish an itemised price list of the different costs incurred in arranging a funeral.

Mr. Leigh: I agree that an itemised price list would be desirable, and am in touch with the National Association of Funeral Directors on the matter. However, my preference is always for self-regulation if this can be made effective.

Steel

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much steel is made per head of population in each OECD and European Community country.

Mr. Leigh: The information is given in the table.

Crude Steel Production in OECD Countries, 1990

	Crude steel production ('000 tonnes) (1)	*Population ('000s) (2)*	*Production per 1,000 population (tonnes) (1)/(2)*
EC Countries:			
Luxembourg	3,560	381	9,344
Belgium	11,360	9,993	1,137
Germany[1]	44,020	79,565	553
Italy	25,467	57,647	442
Netherlands	5,411	14,944	362
France	19,016	56,437	337
Spain	12,935	38,966	332
United Kingdom	17,902	57,408	312
Denmark	610	5,140	119
Greece	999	10,140	99
Ireland	326	3,503	93
Portugal	717	10,369	69
EC total	142,323	344,493	413
Other OECD Countries:			
Japan	110,339	123,540	893
Finland	2,860	4,982	574
Austria	4,291	7,712	556
Sweden	4,454	8,566	520
Canada	12,184	26,620	458
Australia	6,670	17,086	390
USA	89,726	251,394	357
Turkey	9,320	57,163	163
Switzerland	1,050	6,796	155
Norway	376	4,242	89
New Zealand	[3]na	3,379	[3]na
Iceland	[3]na	256	[3]na
OECD total[2]	383,593	852,594	450

[1] Unified Germany (production data from International Iron and Steel Institute).
[2] Excludes New Zealand and Iceland.
[3] Not available. (However, estimates suggest production per head in New Zealand and Iceland is at the lower end of the OECD range).

Notes:
(1) Source: OECD
(2) Source: OECD, mid-year estimates

Post Office

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy to introduce subsidies to maintain the current network of rural sub-post offices.

Mr. Leigh: The Government have no plans to introduce a subsidy to maintain the current network of rural post offices. This is because the Post Office is committed to maintaining a nationwide network of post offices adequate to enable it to fulfil its statutory duty to have regard to the social, commercial and industrial needs of the United Kingdom. We are content that the Post Office manages the network in full recognition of its commitment.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to bring forward legislation allowing Post Office Counters Ltd. to negotiate new business with banks, building societies and insurance companies.

Mr. Leigh: Post Office Counters' powers are set down in section 7 of the Post Office Act 1969, as amended by section 58 of the British Telecommunications Act 1981. There is provision for these powers to be extended, subject to specific ministerial consent.

The Government recognise the desire of Post Office Counters to increase its efficiency by offering its customers additional services. But we continue to be reluctant to see any extension of the public sector not least because unfair competition may result. For this reason, despite careful consideration we have not been able to approve requests from Post Office Counters for extensions to its powers. We shall nevertheless continue to consider on their merits any specific requests.

Sub-postmasters may and do offer a wide range of products in the non-post office parts of their premises, their main restriction being that these should not compete with those offered at the post office counter.

Teesside Industrial Estate

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many units have been *(a)* constructed and *(b)* let by English Estates at the Teesside industrial estate, Thornaby, since June 1987.

Mr. Leigh: The information requested is as follows:

	Let		Sold		Vacant		Total Stock	
	Units	'000 m^2	Units	'000 m^2	Units	'000 m^2	Units	'000 m^2
Position June 1987	83	40	12	63	15	27	110	130
Position January 1992	74	46	31	88	18	8	123	142

In addition, terms have been agreed for lease or sale of a further five units.

Bicycles

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will abolish the requirement that United Kingdom bicycle manufacturers pay duty on imported gear and brake components.

Mr. Sainsbury: The duty payable on gear and brake components for bicycles is laid down in the European Community's common customs tariff. However, the Community's offer on tariffs in the current GATT Uruguay round negotiations does envisage a reduction in the duty paid on these products.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many Chinese bicycles were imported into the United Kingdom in each of the years from 1979 to date; what percentage they were of the total sold in each such year; what level of Chinese importation penetration he expects between now and 1996; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The available information is given in the table. There are no estimates of future import penetration.

Year	Number of imported bicycles from China	Percentage United Kingdom Sales
1979	327	—
1980	7,025	—
1981	2,203	—
1982	150	—
1983	1,279	—
1984	7,215	—
1985	1,463	—
1986	36,004	2
1987	109,011	5
1988	57,426	3
1989	309,900	11
1990	454,811	16

Source: Bicycle Association of Great Britain, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise Trade Data.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will make a statement concerning the current EC anti-dumping investigation into the importation of Chinese bicycles into the Community;

(2) if he will introduce measures to protect domestic bicycle manufacturers against the dumping of imported bicycles from the far east; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The European Commission, which is responsible for anti-dumping action, initiated an investigation into imports of bicycles from China and Taiwan on 12 October 1991 following a complaint lodged by the European Bicycle Manufacturers Association. The Government will be consulted by the Commission about its initial findings once the preliminary investigation has been completed.

Arms Exports

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what impact the Gulf war has had on his Department's monitoring of the export of weapons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: All export licence applications for the export of weapons to any destination have always been, and remain, subject to rigorous scrutiny.

Enterprise Measures

Dame Janet Fookes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what his Department has done to encourage enterprise and innovation in British industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: Since the publication of the White Paper "DTI—the department for Enterprise" in January 1988, my Department has spent over £800 million in a range of initiatives to encourage enterprise and innovation in British industry and a very large number of firms have benefited. Applications to the Department's consultancy scheme under the enterprise initiative are now approaching 100,000 and the 40,000th project under the scheme was completed last week. Forty thousand managers have attended seminars and other live events under the "Managing into the 90s" awareness programme which was launched in 1989. The small firms merit award for research and technology—SMART—scheme has grown steadily since its introduction on a pilot basis in 1986. The last three annual competitions attracted 3,663 applications and more than 500 awards were made with a total Government commitment of £29 million. The support for products under research—SPUR—scheme introduced last year has been a great success with industry: over £9 million of Government support has already been committed and the 100th grant under the scheme was awarded this week. My Department has spent over £200 million in support of collaborative research programmes during the past three financial years. These achievements are part of my Department's continuing programme to stimulate innovation and to help companies to prepare for the challenges of the 1990s.

I announced last week that I am stepping up support for innovation by increasing expenditure over the next three years. Total provision for the DTI's innovation budget which is aimed at supporting industrial R and D will be some £346 million over three years. The budget is set to rise from £101 million in 1991-92 to £126 million in 1994-95. This represents a 27 per cent. increase in real terms over the 1990-91 outturn figure of £83 million and a 12 per cent. real terms increase over the estimated outturn of £101 million in 1991-92.

I am pleased to announce today extensions to the SMART scheme, subject to clearance with the European Commission, and the "Managing into the 90s" initiative, and a sister programme to the successful teaching company scheme which will encourage senior academics to

work in industry. My Department will also fund an extension of the Shell technology enterprise programme. We shall continue our commitment to the enterprise initiative and to support for collaborative research including the Link initiative. The following paragraphs give more detail.

We shall be extending initiatives to help smaller firms. I am very pleased to announce a new three year programme of SMART competitions worth more than £40 million. This represents an increase of more than 40 per cent. over the corresponding budget during the last three years. SMART is open to individuals and organisations with fewer than 50 employees. Each year we shall be offering 180 stage I awards worth up to £45,000 each, for highly innovative projects with real commercial promise. Winners of the stage I awards are eligible to apply for stage II awards, each worth up to £60,000, towards further development work.

The "Managing into the 90s" awareness campaign, which seeks to spread best management practice, has had real impact amongst small and medium-sized enterprises. Building on this success, the programme will be extended and updated in a new phase which I am announcing today. Starting this summer, the new phase will focus on management practices which can help business rise to the challenges of competitive markets, innovate successfully and manage effectively the resulting need for change. New topics will be introduced relating to this theme. Part of the programme will specifically address the needs of the manufacturing sector. Representatives of training and enterprise councils have indicated that they welcome the new phase and that they look forward to co-operating with DTI over it.

The senior academics in industry programme which I am announcing today builds on the concept of the highly successful teaching company scheme. The programme, which will be run on a pilot basis for two years, will support the placement of senior academics in industry, for up to six months, to carry out a technology project which will benefit from their knowledge and research experience.

My Department will also fund an expansion of the Shell technology enterprise programme—STEP. This programme puts undergraduates into small firms in order to encourage students to consider careers in industry and help small firms realise the benefits of employing graduates. My Department will be making a contribution of £500,000 over three years, which will enable Shell almost to double the number of placements.

The Link initiative is proving a highly sucessful mechanism for encouraging collaborative research between industry and academia. Link is now firmly established as a process whereby large and small companies can co-operate with academia in high quality, industrially-relevant research. The Government are today publishing its response to the Segal Quince Wicksteed review of Link and I also warmly welcome the publication of the LINK steering group's first report. Today I am also announcing extensions of two particularly successful Link programmes for two further years with additional funding. The first of these is the Link nanotechnology programme, which is run jointly by DTI and the Science and Engineering Research Council. The programme will receive additional funding of £4 million from the Government. I am also announcing extension of the Link food processing programme which will receive additional Government funding of £3 million, including £2 million from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Inmos Ltd.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the value of money and shares *(a)* paid by the Government to set up Inmos Ltd., *(b)* received by the Government for the sale of Inmos to Thorn EMI and *(c)* the total paid to Inmos Ltd. and SGS Thomson in grants and loans from public funds.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 14 February 1992]: (a)* The value of the Government shareholding in Inmos as at 31 December 1983 was £65·9 million, representing investment in ordinary and preference shares over a period of years; *(b)* the company was sold to Thorn EMI in 1984 at a profit of £29·6 million; *(c)* information on the amount of grant paid to individual companies is commercially confidential.

Garment Imports

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what controls exist to monitor and prevent dumping of cashmere garments imported into the EC/United Kingdom from Mongolia;

(2) what access Mongolia has to EC and United Kingdom domestic markets for importation of Mongolian cashmere garments.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* At present 10 member states maintain an embargo on a range of Mongolian garments, including pullovers, under the European Community's autonomous regime for state trading countries. Portugal has no such restrictions and therefore does not monitor the imports, Germany has a quota of 23,000 pieces for pullovers, monitored by import licensing, under which 1,260 fine animal hair products were imported in the first 10 months of 1991. As regards dumping, as with all other industrial products it is open to the Community industry concerned to present a case for anti-dumping action to the European Commission.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what claims for compensation are available to the United Kingdom manufacturers of fine animal hair pullovers where overshipment occurs;

(2) whether he will consider taking steps for the imposition of a complete embargo on Chinese cashmere garments *(a)* into the EC and *(b)* into the United Kingdom until agreed quota figures for previous years have been met;

(3) what representations he proposes to make to the EC authorities and the GATT authorities to investigate and remedy overshipment of Chinese cashmere garments into the EC/United Kingdom markets; what steps he is taking to prepare a case for compensation for overshipment of such garments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* Management of the EC/China multi-fibre arrangement textiles agreement is the responsibility of the European Commission and member states. In November last year we asked the Commission to investigate the apparent overshipment of the quota for Chinese fine animal hair pullovers in 1990 and 1991. There are no formal rules for

dealing with compensation in cases of this sort, but we have specifically asked the Commission to address this aspect. In the past, overshipments have been compensated for by deducting an equivalent amount from the quota for the following year for that product. The measures appropriate in the present case will have to be decided once the outcome of the Commission's investigation is known. In the meantime, the Commission has already accepted our proposal for a new quota management system to tighten up controls.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the customs returns showing the numbers of cashmere garments imported into the EC, and into the United Kingdom, from China for each of the last five years for which figures are available, together with the relevant numbers permitted under the GATT bilateral quotas for the same years.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* Cashmere garments cannot be separately identified in customs import data. The quota in the EC/China MFA bilateral agreement which specifically applies to fine animal hair products is for pullovers and similar goods, whether made of cashmere, angora, mohair or other fine animal hairs.

The quota levels and the EC and United Kingdom import levels for these goods in the past five years are as follows:

Year	*EC quota*	*EC imports*[1]	*United Kingdom share of quota*	*United Kingdom imports*[1]
1987	55,680	87,540	12,400	20,740
1988	57,910	123,214	12,900	1,990
1989	90,000	50,312	20,000	2,000
1990	94,000	238,728	21,000	4,151
1991	97,000	399,184	22,000	8,615

[1] Import figures may include traditional Chinese products which fall outside quota.
Source: Eurostat.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Driving Licences

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table to show how many persons in Northern Ireland currently hold a driving licence, the type of licence and the percentage of the population aged 17 years and over which holds a licence to drive.

Mr. Needham: At 31 March 1991, the most recent date for which this information is currently available, the figures were as follows:

	Number
Provisional Licence	120,150
Full Driving Licence	785,975
Large Goods Vehicle Licence	26,472
Large Passenger Carrying Vehicle Licence	4,664
Taxi Licence	7,167

The 912,125 licence holders represent some 80 per cent. of the population aged 17 years and over.

Linfield Yarns

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultations have taken place with the management of Linfield Yarns concerning the temporary closure of its factory at Killyleagh, Co Down.

Mr. Needham: The international market for linen yarn has been in a depressed state for more than two years. During that time the Industrial Development Board has remained in close touch with all the firms in the sub-sector including the Linfield group who own Killyleagh Yarns. Most of Northern Ireland's flax spinners have found it necessary to operate some form of short-time working and in the case of Killyleagh Yarns the management decided to introduce a temporary stoppage during February 1992. This decision was fully discussed with IDB.

In the event there has not been a complete closure of the factory as originally intended. Approximately one third of the work force has been retained in order to meet unexpected orders.

Social Security Interviews

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make arrangements whereby all social security and benefit interviews will be conducted in private.

Mr. Hanley: Social security operational matters are the responsibility of Mr. Alec Wylie, chief executive of the Social Security Agency. He will write to the hon. Gentleman and copies of his reply will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action will be taken to reduce the time involved in relation to mobility allowance tribunal hearings.

Mr. Hanley: The preparation of submissions to appeal hearings is the responsibility of the Social Security Agency. I am advised by the chief executive that the average time taken from receipt of an appeal letter to its submission to the Independent Tribunal Service is approximately 27 days.

Arrangements for the actual hearing of appeals are a matter for the president of the Independent Tribunal Service, Mr. MacLynn, and any request for information regarding such arrangements should be forwarded to him.

Disabled People (Rights)

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce for Northern Ireland legislation which will provide equal rights for people with disabilities with rights to legal redress.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Mourne Hospital, Kilkeel

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps will be taken to ensure that acute hospital services are provided at Mourne hospital, Kilkeel, on an on-going basis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The Mourne hospital, Kilkeel does not provide acute hospital services. Responsibility for the management of the hospital rests with the Southern health and social services board and I am not aware of any plans for developing acute services at the hospital.

Orthodontics

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the outcome of the review into orthodontic provision within the health and social services boards in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The following action has been taken on the recommendations made in the review of orthodontic provision in Northern Ireland:

—the vacant consultant orthodontic post in the Southern health and social services board is to be advertised next month;

—the upgrading of consultant facilities at Altnagelvin has commenced;

—Health and social services boards are encouraging general dental practitioners to use the community dental service when making reference to orthodontic specialists; and

—a MOrth/MSc course is set to commence in October this year.

Ambulance Response Times

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to reduce ambulance response times in the Newry and Mourne unit of management.

Mr. Hanley: Over the six months period to December 1991, between 55 and 60 per cent. of emergency calls in the Newry and Mourne area were responded to within eight minutes and almost 93 per cent. within 19 minutes. The nationally agreed ambulance service standards for these response times are 50 and 95 per cent. respectively. The situation in the Newry and Mourne unit is being closely monitored and every effort is being made by management to keep response times to a minimum.

Downpatrick Hospital

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has taken place in relation to the building of the third phase of the new hospital for Downpatrick on the Downshire hospital site.

Mr. Hanley: The Eastern health and social services board has not made any proposals to the Department of Health and Social Services concerning the construction of a third phase of the new hospital.

Downe Hospital, Downpatrick

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps will be taken to reduce the waiting lists for the out-patient clinics for dermatology, ophthalmology and ear, nose and throat at the Downe hospital, Downpatrick, Co. Down.

Mr. Hanley: Information about the numbers of people awaiting out-patient appointments is not collected centrally. However, I can assure you that I expect health and social services boards to take action to ensure that waiting times for out-patient clinics are kept to a minimum. The management of out-patient clinics at the Downe hospital, Downpatrick is primarily the responsibility of the Eastern board, and the hon. Gentleman may wish to contact Mr. Norman Ferguson, the chairman of the board.

Nurse Clinical Grading Appeals

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many stage three appeals in respect of the nurse clinical grading appeal scheme have yet to be heard in the Southern health and social services board.

Mr. Hanley: A total of 283 at 10 February 1992.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what additional resources will be allocated to the nurse clinical grading appeal scheme in order to expedite outstanding cases within the Southern health and social services board.

Mr. Hanley: A total of £3[illegible] million was allocated to the boards in April 1988 to cover the full cost of implementation of the scheme including appeals. There are no plans to provide additional resources.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many appeals in respect of the nurse clinical grading appeal scheme have yet to be heard in the Down section of the Down and Lisburn unit of management.

Mr. Hanley: A total of 92 at 10 February 1992.

Local Enterprise Development, South Down

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to establish a Local Enterprise Development Unit office in the constituency of South Down.

Mr. Needham: There are no plans to establish a LEDU office in the constituency of South Down. The area is covered by LEDU's southern regional office in Newry.

Labour Statistics

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many young people under 25 years of age are currently unemployed; and if he will list the numbers by district council area.

Mr. Needham: At January 1992, the latest date for which information is available, there were 28,686 unemployed claimants under 25 years of age in Northern Ireland. Information on the numbers of unemployed young persons by district council area is available from the NOMIS database which can be accessed on-line by House of Commons Library staff.

Colleges of Further Education

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the funding allocations to colleges of further education in each of the education and library boards since 1 April 1982 to 31 March 1992.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

£000s

	Belfast	*Western*	*North-Eastern*	*South-Eastern*	*Southern*
1982-83	3,683	1,903	2,878	2,313	3,347
1983-84	3,838	1,961	3,041	2,300	2,907
1984-85	3,904	2,153	2,963	2,545	2,866

	Belfast	Western	North-Eastern	South-Eastern	Southern
1985-86	3,805	2,381	3,252	2,786	2,974
1986-87	4,018	2,489	3,270	2,948	3,443
1987-88	4,191	2,820	3,596	3,137	4,483
1988-89	5,678	3,307	3,975	3,856	5,662
1989-90	6,265	3,806	4,405	4,162	7,026
1990-91	6,472	4,121	4,896	4,655	8,620
1991-92	17,510	11,513	14,763	13,292	15,169

Notes:
1. The figures represent recurrent and capital expenditure, for the years 1982-83 to 1989-90 they are taken from the boards' audited accounts and for 1990-91 from the unaudited accounts.
2. The figures for 1991-92 are the boards' further and higher education budgets as stated in their financial schemes. Following the introduction of local management of colleges on 1/4/91 these budgets include provision for full time teachers' salaries, which had previously been paid directly by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland.

Registration of Clubs

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the organisations and individuals which have made representations regarding the provisions of the Registration of Clubs (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 and the regulations made thereunder.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:
Armagh City and District Arts Committee.
Association of Local Authorities in Northern Ireland.
Craigavon Borough Council.
Environmental Health Department, Belfast City Council.
Golfing Union of Ireland, Ulster Branch.
Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland.
Irish Rugby Football Union, Ulster Branch.
Law Society of Northern Ireland.
Northern Ireland Bridge Union.
Northern Ireland Federation of Clubs.
Sports Council for Northern Ireland.
The Workers Party.
Ballyclare Rugby Football Club.
Ballymoney Rugby Football Club.
Collegians Club.
Donaghadee Rugby Football Club.
Dromore Rugby Football Club.
Dungannon Football Club.
Knock Golf Club.
Lisburn Rugby Football Club.
Malone Rugby Football Club.
Omagh Academicals Rugby Football Club.
Pearce Og GAA Club, Armagh.
Portadown Rugby Football Club.
Rainey Old Boys Rugby Football Club.
Royal Ulster Yacht Club.
Warrenpoint Commercial Club.
Roy Beggs Esq. MP (Councillor) [for Whitehouse Working Men's Club].
Dr. Joseph Hendron (Councillor).
Seamus Mallon Esq MP [for GAA Clubs].
Eddie McGrady Esq. MP [for Lecale Indoor Bowling League].
Cecil Walker Esq. MP [for Northern Ireland Federation of Clubs].
Three members of the public.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will place in the Library a copy of the representations made to his predecessor on 7 June 1989 by the Golfing Union of Ireland (Ulster branch) on the subject of the Registration of Clubs (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 and the regulations made thereunder; and what response has been given to those representations.

Mr. Hanley: A copy of the representations, with the response, has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has yet considered the review, dated 4 April 1990, of the operation of the Registration of Clubs (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 by the licensing legislation and voluntary sports clubs joint working group; if he will place a copy of the review in the Library; and if he intends to take into account the recommendations made in that review.

Mr. Hanley: I have considered the review and a copy has been placed in the Library. I shall take its recommendations into account in considering the relevant legislation.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to complete his review of the Registration of Clubs (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 and the regulations made thereunder; and when he expects to introduce proposals for further legislation on this subject.

Mr. Hanley: The order and regulations are kept under continuous review. The Government have no plans at present to introduce proposals for further legislation in this field.

Set-aside Schemes

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many set-aside schemes have been implemented in the constituency of South Down since 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1991 and from 1 April 1991 to 31 December 1991.

Mr. Hanley: Statistics are not available on a constituency basis, however, the numbers of farmers entering into set-aside agreements in the whole of County Down is as follows:

	1 April 1988— 31 March 1991—	*1 April 1991 31 December 1991*
5 year scheme	13	8
1 year scheme[1]	n/a	5

Note:
[1] The 1 year set-aside scheme was introduced in September 1991 and will run to August 1992.

Industrial Sites

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in obtaining land for industrial sites on the Ballydugan road, Downpatrick; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: IDB is negotiating for the purchase of a six acre site at Down Race club, to be used for industrial purposes. While I hope that the negotiations will be successful, the outcome will not be known for some months.

Blood Products

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many donations of blood were taken by the National Blood Transfusion Service in Northern Ireland in each year from 1978 to the latest year available.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* The information requested is not immediately available. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of that letter in the Library.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many transfers of *(a)* blood and *(b)* blood products were performed by the national health service in Northern Ireland in each year from 1978 to the latest year available.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* This information is not held centrally.

WALES

Housing Associations

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to increase the level of grant rate for housing associations in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The level of housing association grant is linked to building society mortgage rates. It falls to Housing for Wales to adjust the grant rate accordingly.

Compensation Claim

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the claim for compensation on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Heselton, Runston farm, Shirenewton, Chepstow, Gwent; when he expects a resolution to the matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department wrote to Mr. and Mrs. Heselton's solicitors on 3 January 1991 in response to a claim for costs arising out of a planning application. No representations have been received since then, but I understand that the solicitors have approached the Ministry of Defence on this matter.

Usk Barrage

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding the impact on fish on the River Usk and its tributaries of the proposed Usk barrage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have received a number of representations about the impact of the proposed Usk barrage on fish stocks.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the proposed Usk barrage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have received 53 representations concerning the proposed Usk barrage. Most of them refer to the environmental impact of the barrage.

Sewage Treatment

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from Usk town council, Usk civic society and Usk action group regarding the application for a sewage treatment plant at the island picnic site near the River Usk; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I understand that representations were made by Usk town council and Usk Civic Society in the context of a planning appeal for a sewage treatment plant. The appeal fell to be determined by a planning inspector appointed by my right hon. Friend and, following a local inquiry, his decision to allow the appeal was issued on 30 January. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the merits of the development.

Elderly People

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the latest figures for the percentage of *(a)* elderly men and *(b)* elderly women living in homes for old and disabled elderly people in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: On 31 March 1990, 22·1 per cent. of residents in homes for the elderly were men aged 65 or over and 76·0 per cent. women over that age. The remainder were under 65. Residents aged 65 or over represent 15·7 per 1,000 population in that age group in the case of men, and 36·1 per 1,000 in that of women.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the latest available figures showing the incidence of dementia amongst the elderly population in Wales; and if he will give an overall breakdown according to type of dementia.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Studies suggest that approximately 10 per cent. of people in Wales aged 65 and over, and 25 per cent. of those over 80, show evidence of intellectual failure.

County teams working to implement the all-Wales mental illness stategy are expected to assess local need and, over time, that should help to build up a clearer picture of the incidence of dementia.

Disability

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the severity and age distribution of disability by its various medical causes in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information on the distribution of disability by medical cause is not held centrally.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to announce decisions on HLCA payments for each forthcoming year no later than the end of December in the previous year.

Mr. David Hunt: I fully recognise the importance of the hill livestock compensatory allowance scheme to our livestock producers in less favoured areas, and always seek to ensure that decisions on the HLCA scheme arrangements are announced as quickly as possible.

Coracle Fishermen

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will introduce legislation to safeguard the future interests of the coracle fishermen in west Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I am aware of the concern about the future of the coracle fishermen in west Wales and the cost of their fishing licences, and am considering the representations that have been made to me.

Ewes

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many flocks of more than 1,000 breeding ewes there are in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: There were 898 main holdings with flocks of more than 1,000 breeding sheep in Wales in June 1991.

Dyfed Health Authority

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was *(a)* the capital and *(b)* the revenue allocation of East Dyfed health authority for the financial year 1991-92; and what were the corresponding figures for each of the other health authorities in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested, relating to the latest notified discretionary capital and revenue allocations for 1991-92 for the East Dyfed health authority and for other district health authorities in Wales, is as follows:

	Discretionary Capital Allocation 1991-92 £ million	*Discretionary Revenue Allocation 1991-92 £ million*
Clwyd	18·3	147·8
East Dyfed	3·6	91·4
Gwent	7·5	159·1
Gwynedd	5·3	89·5
Mid Glamorgan	10·6	205·9
Pembrokeshire	3·9	40·7
Powys	2·7	53·1
South Glamorgan	11·4	180·9
West Glamorgan	12·3	134·2

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the proposed *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue allocation of East Dyfed health authority for the financial year 1992-93; and what are the corresponding figures for each of the other health authorities in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that my right hon. Friend gave to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 4 February, when he announced the allocation of resources for hospital, community health and related services in Wales for 1992-93.

EC Committee of the Regions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a consultation document on the most appropriate means for Wales to be represented among the 24 representatives from the United Kingdom on the European Community Committee of the Regions.

Mr. David Hunt: I have no plans to do so. The Government will be considering in the course of 1992 how the 24 United Kingdom seats should be allocated and the candidates chosen.

Charge Capping

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his statement of 12 February, *Official Report*, column *1053*, if he will give figures for the numbers of civil servants who have been allocated to the special unit he has set up to make the necessary arrangement for charge capping; how many of them are full time with no other duties; what is its total estimated establishment cost; and if he will make a statement on the main principles by which it will perform its duties.

Mr. David Hunt: The principles governing the charge capping of local authorities in Wales are set out in part VII of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, as amended by the Local Government Finance and Valuation Act 1991.

The number of staff required for the special unit will depend on the number of authorities setting budgets above my expenditure plans as approved by Parliament on 12 February. The bulk of the work of the unit will involve individual scrutiny of such budgets, to enable me to decide whether they place an unacceptable burden on charge payers.

Counties are required to set their budgets before 1 March, and districts before 11 March.

Schools Inspectors

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which grant-maintained schools have been visited by Her Majesty's inspectors; in each case *(a)* by how many inspectors, *(b)* for how long and *(c)* at what cost; and whether it is proposed to publish any report arising from these visits.

Sir Wyn Roberts *[holding answer 3 February 1992]:* Her Majesty's inspectors have made two visits to Cwmcarn comprehensive grant-maintained school. On both occasions, one inspector visited the school and stayed for the day. The cost of the visits was around £500. In addition, when I visited the school last December, I was accompanied by a member of the inspectorate.

Visits of that nature do not result in published reports but contribute to more general reports, such as the HMI annual review of educational provision in Wales.

SCOTLAND

Boundary Commission

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Boundary Commission for Scotland has yet decided when to start a general review of constituencies in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 requires the Boundary Commission for Scotland to submit its next general report between February 1993 and February 1998 and within these limits the commission has discretion when to start a general review. The commission, in the exercise of its discretion, gave notice on 16 February 1992 of its intention to commence forthwith a general review of constituencies in Scotland.

Constituencies

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the six largest and six smallest electorates in parliamentary constituencies and the average electorate for each constituency.

Mr. Dorrell: I have been asked to reply.

The United Kingdom constituencies with largest and smallest parliamentary electorates in 1991 were as follows:

	Number
Largest	
Isle of Wight	101,784
Eastleigh	91,871
Huntingdon	91,779
East Hampshire	91,519
The Wrekin	90,980
Swindon	90,343
Smallest	
Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale	39,608
Glasgow Provan	37,838
Meirionnydd Nant Conwy	32,754
Orkney and Shetland	31,355
Caithness and Sutherland	31,120
Western Isles	23,073

The average parliamentary constituency electorates in 1991 were 66,908 in the United Kingdom and 66,915 in Great Britain, counting Milton Keynes as two constituencies in both cases. Corresponding information relating to the 1992 registers is not yet available.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he is considering to dispose of the assets of the Forestry Commission or any part of them to the public sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 January 1992]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) on 16 June 1989, *Official Report*, columns *542-43*. This remains the Government's policy.

DEFENCE

Employment (Scotland)

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilian personnel are employed by the Ministry of Defence in Scotland.

Mr. Alan Clark: There were 12,125 as at 1 January 1992.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he plans any new construction to aid rapid dismantling of British nuclear weapons withdrawn from service.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the implications of the announced reduction in numbers of WE177 free-fall nuclear weapons held by the RAF for his Department's plans for the development of a tactical air-to-surface missile.

Mr. Alan Clark: There are none.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what differences exist between WE177s in *(a)* Royal Navy and *(b)* RAF service.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not our practice to discuss details of nuclear weapon design.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the composition of the special nuclear experts team sent to Russia on 10 February to evaluate the problems in dismantling and transporting the nuclear weapons being removed from deployment; what criteria were used in choosing these experts; and whether any specialist non-governmental organisations have been consulted as to the most appropriate technical approaches required.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The team was led by the Ministry of Defence's principal technical adviser on nuclear matters, and included experts on nuclear weapons and materials from Government and from industry. The composition of the team was decided in the light of advance contacts with the Russian authorities and information received from allies who had previously visited Russia.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to meet experts from Scientists for Global Responsibility to discuss its reports on the methods and risks of dismantling nuclear warheads.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Harrier

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to give the Harrier GR5 or GR7 a nuclear role.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Submarines, Irish Sea

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department next expects to meet representatives of the fishing industry in order to discuss submarine activity in the Irish sea.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Ministry of Defence officials will discuss this and other matters with representatives of the fishing industry in the sub-group of the Fishing Industry Safety Group set up to consider submarine operations and fishing vessel safety. The sub-group is chaired by the Department of Transport and officials there will shortly be making arrangements for a further meeting.

Departmental Orders

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, by value, the orders placed by his Department with Scottish-based defence industry individual companies in the last 10 years.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only with disproportionate cost and effort.

Arms Sales

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of British arms exports are sold to *(a)* third world countries and *(b)* to the middle east countries; how those proportions have varied in the past few years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991, volume 2, table 2.7.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what impact the Gulf war has had on his Department's monitoring of the export of weapons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: All export licence applications for the export of weapons to any destination have always been subject to the most rigorous scrutiny.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information his Department has on the proportion of world trade in arms sold to (i) third world countries and (ii) middle east countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The proportion of world trade in arms sold to third world countries is 35 per cent. and to middle east countries 42 per cent. These figures represent an average based on 1986 to 1990 data.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 19 February 1992

TRANSPORT

Merchant Shipping

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the tonnage of cargo carried by merchant ships owned and registered in the United Kingdom for each year since 1979.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information available relates to imports to, and exports from, the United Kingdom.

Weight of cargo carried in United Kingdom-registered ships imported to, or exported from, the United Kingdom: 1979-1990

Year	('000 tonnes)
1979	72,870
1980	78,534
1981	67,943
1982	67,842
1983	59,306
1984	63,038
1985	65,796
1986	62,655
1987	65,547
1988	60,693
1989	60,338
1990	53,982

These statistics exclude:
tonnage carried in United Kingdom owned ships, which are not registered in the United Kingdom, and
tonnage carried in United Kingdom registered ships engaged in non-United Kingdom trade.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of merchant ships owned and registered in the United Kingdom for each year since 1979.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested is given in the table:

United Kingdom owned and registered training vessels (500 grt and over): 1979-1991 (end-December)

	Number
1979	1,194
1980	1,143
1981	994
1982	868
1983	769
1984	690
1985	627
1986	496
1987	462
1988	437
1989	407
1990	378
1991	370

Trunk Road Construction

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which trunk road building schemes are planned to receive Government expenditure in the years *(a)* 1993-94, *(b)* 1994-95 and *(c)* 1995-96; and how much each scheme will cost in total.

Mr. Rifkind: Trunk road building schemes which will incur works expenditure by Government in the three years from 1993-94 to 1995-96 comprise schemes already under construction at the start of 1993-94, and new starts during each of the three years.

I shall be announcing shortly new starts for 1992-93. The composition of new starts in subsequent years will depend on progress with statutory procedures and the availability of funds in those years.

Total provision for new construction is currently £1,395 million in 1992-93, £1,477 million in 1993-94 and £1,511 million in 1994-95.

Ship Brokers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much his Department paid in fees or salary for each of the last three years in respect of *(a)* the Government freight market representative on the Baltic exchange, *(b)* the Government freight agent and *(c)* other specialist ship brokers.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government freight market representative received no payments from the Department. Payments were made to the Government freight agent (GFA) in respect of freight forwarding and shipping services for the movement of Government cargoes by land, sea and air. These totalled £1,919,145 and £1,514,812 during the years 1988-89 and 1989-90 respectively. Since 1 January 1990, the Ministry of Defence has been responsible for the appointment of the GFA. This Department has made no payments to other specialised ship brokers.

Port Buy-out Bids

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to bids for management buy-outs in respect of the trust ports of Medway and Tilbury.

Mr. McLoughlin: It will be for Medway ports authority and the Port of London authority, once they have received the final bids for their ports, including those expected from management and employee buy-out teams, to assess them against the objectives of sale agreed for each port and to make their recommendations to my right hon. and learned Friend, who will then consider them.

Lorry and Bus Drivers

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further steps he is taking to improve the training offered to learner lorry and bus drivers.

Mr. Chope: I am pleased to say that the Driving Standards Agency, an executive agency of the Department of Transport, today issued a consultation paper to over 100 organisations concerned with driver training and road safety on a draft syllabus for trainee lorry and bus drivers.

The syllabus will be published later this year, along with guidance on the lorry and bus driving test, and will provide the basis for a structured programme of training. By reference to the syllabus such drivers will be able to confirm the standard of driving they are receiving and check for themselves their training programme and progress.

British Rail, Scotland

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state the proposed capital expenditure plans for British Rail in Scotland for each of the next five years.

Mr. Freeman: BR keeps only limited historic information on investment on a geographic basis. There is no information on rolling stock investment, and as BR plans on a business sector basis there is no information for future years.

Aviation Services

Mr. Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made by EC member states towards providing for a single market in aviation services by the end of 1992, with respect in particular to the abolition of bilateral air servicing agreements and to the permitting of cross border investment by one airline in another.

Mr. McLoughlin: Good progress is being made. The third and final stage of EC air transport liberalisation measures is under negotiation in Brussels and is due to take effect by 1 Janaury 1993. Air services between and within EC member states will then be covered by EC rules rather than bilateral provisions. Cross-border investment between airlines is already covered by provisions relating to competition, including the EC mergers regulation which took effect in 1990.

British Airways

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had with British Airways following publication of "A Manifesto for Civil Aviation in the 1990s."

Mr. McLoughlin: There are continuing contacts between the Department and British Airways about matters of mutual interest. While there have been no discussions specifically about BA's manifesto, I am pleased to note that there is no difference between the Government and BA in wishing to break down barriers to competition.

Oil Standby Vessels

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the number of oil standby vessels in the United Kingdom continental shelf, and what is the name of each vessel, its owner, the date on which it was first registered, and the date of the most recent inspection.

Mr. McLoughlin: The number of vessels certificated for use in the United Kingdom standby industry is at present 176.

Attached is a list of these vessels which includes the name of owner, date of registration and the date of the vessel's last inspection.

Name	*Owner*	*Date of registration*[1]	*Date of last inspection*
Aberdonian	Nomis Shipping Ltd.	1977	3 December 1991
Alexandra Tide	Tidewater Marine	January 1974	20 December 1991
Anegada	Knight/Carvel	May 1962	11 July 1991
Atlantic Defender	Swire Pacific	1979	2 December 1991
Atlantic Guardian	Swire Pacific	1980	20 December 1991
Barnsley	Knight/Carvel	October 1960	31 May 1991
Barra Supplier	Barra Shipping	1984	4 June 1991
Black Isle	Black Ice Ltd.	1973	14 October 1991
Black Watch	Black Watch Ltd.	April 1977	6 January 1992
Blue Flame I	Putford Enterprises	October 1976	6 March 1991
Breydon Eider	Breydon Marine	March 1961	9 April 1991
Britannia Challenger	Britannia Marine	April 1964	10 April 1991
Britannia Champion	Suffolk Marine	February 1980	17 May 1991
Britannia Chieftain	Suffolk Marine	1973	9 January 1992
Britannia Cobra	Britannia Marine	April 1978	6 March 1991
Britannia Conquest	Suffolk Marine	February 1974	25 April 1991
Britannia Crusader	Suffolk Marine	1976	17 September 1991
Britannia Endeavour	Suffolk Marine	1975	22 October 1991
Britannia Fury	Britannia Marine	October 1972	19 March 1991
Britannia Gazelle	Britannia Marine	August 1978	21 March 1991
Britannia Harvester	Suffolk Marine	December 1972	3 April 1991
Britannia Knight	Suffolk Marine	June 1976	9 April 1991
Britannia Monarch	Suffolk Marine	September 1973	16 April 1991
Britannia Stallion	Britannia Marine	November 1978	4 April 1991
Britannia Venturer	Suffolk Marine	1965	19 September 1991
Britannia Vixen	Britannia Marine	January 1978	19 March 1991
Britannia Warrior	Suffolk Marine	June 1973	16 February 1991
CAM Cheetah	CAM Shipping Ltd.	November 1959	13 December 1991
CAM Civet	CAM Shipping Ltd.	November 1960	31 December 1991
CAM Cougar	CAM Shipping Ltd.	June 1958	9 December 1991
CAM Defender	CAM Standby Ltd.	1983	30 October 1991
CAM Genet	CAM Shipping Ltd.	October 1960	6 January 1992
CAM Guardian	CAM Shipping Ltd.	October 1970	9 December 1991
CAM Jaguar	CAM Shipping Ltd.	December 1957	19 December 1991
CAM Lynx	CAM Shipping Ltd.	January 1960	19 December 1991
CAM Observer	CAM Offshore Ltd.	1953	13 December 1991

Name	Owner	Date of registration[1]	Date of last inspection
CAM Panther	CAM Shipping Ltd.	April 1958	29 November 1991
CAM Protector	CAM Standby Ltd.	1983	20 December 1991
CAM Puma	CAM Shipping Ltd.	1966	29 November 1991
CAM Ranger	CAM Offshore Ltd.	1983	17 January 1992
CAM Retriever	CAM Shipping Ltd.	March 1972	25 November 1991
CAM Scout	CAM Offshore Ltd.	1956	31 December 1991
CAM Searcher	CAM Shipping Ltd.	April 1971	28 November 1991
CAM Seeker	Nancy Sea	January 1968	11 December 1991
CAM Sentinel	CAM Shipping Ltd.	1982	16 December 1991
CAM Supporter	CAM Standby Ltd.	1983	24 December 1991
CAM Valiant	CAM Shipping Ltd.	1939	12 February 1992
CAM Vanguard	CAM Offshore Ltd.	June 1955	16 December 1991
CAM Vedette	CAM Shipping Ltd.	1970	14 January 1992
CAM Venturer	Bristow Investments	1973	9 December 1991
CAM Viceroy	CAM Shipping Ltd.	February 1959	8 January 1992
CAM Victor	Charford Shipping	1969	18 December 1991
CAM Viking	Charford Shipping	1972	28 November 1991
CAM Viscount	CAM Shipping Ltd.	1971	29 August 1991
CAM Voyager	Karlsen Navi	1957	23 December 1991
CAM Vulcan	Bristow Investments	1958	14 January 1992
CAM Zebra	CAM Shipping Ltd.	November 1960	7 January 1992
Colne Kestrel	Knight/Carvel	February 1966	21 August 1991
Dawn Blazer	Warbler Shipping	November 1965	3 January 1992
Dawn Gem	Warbler Shipping	July 1958	18 April 1991
Dawn Monarch	Warbler Shipping	June 1961	11 May 1991
Dawn Saviour	Warbler Shipping	April 1960	10 January 1992
Dawn Sky	Warbler Shipping	March 1967	23 May 1991
Dawn Warbler	Warbler Shipping	May 1966	28 June 1991
Dea Supporter	Nomis Shipping Ltd.	1970	27 December 1991
Euan	Garcia Marine	1936	3 May 1991
Exuma	Colne Shipping Ltd.	September 1961	26 September 1991
Far Centurion	Midhope Shipping	1983	1 July 1991
Far Earl	Far Standby Ltd.	1986	30 December 1991
Far Searcher	Far Standby Ltd.	1986	10 December 1991
Far Seeker	Far Standby Ltd.	1986	20 December 1991
Far Sovereign	Silex Ltd.	October 1982	28 February 1991
Far Stream	Far Supply	1982	1 April 1991
Grampian Chieftain	Craig & Sons Ltd.	December 1976	24 May 1991
Grampian City	Craig & Sons Ltd.	September 1976	7 May 1991
Grampian Concord	Craig & Sons Ltd.	June 1961	2 July 1991
Grampian Dawn	Craig & Sons Ltd.	May 1962	30 December 1991
Grampian Dee	Craig & Sons Ltd.	September 1975	22 November 1991
Grampian Eagle	Craig & Sons Ltd.	January 1975	27 December 1991
Grampian Endeavour	Craig & Sons Ltd.	November 1966	12 April 1991
Grampian Explorer	Craig & Sons Ltd.	August 1965	27 December 1991
Grampian Falcon	Craig & Sons Ltd.	1982	1 July 1991
Grampian Forest	Craig & Sons Ltd.	October 1962	6 December 1991
Grampian Freedom	Craig & Sons Ltd.	April 1957	27 December 1991
Grampian Harrier	Craig & Sons Ltd.	1967	6 June 1991
Grampian Highlander	Craig & Sons Ltd.	1976	20 May 1991
Grampian King	Craig & Sons Ltd.	October 1959	26 February 1991
Grampian Osprey	Craig & Sons Ltd.	1937	12 June 1991
Grampian Otter	Craig & Sons Ltd.	1983	27 December 1991
Grampian Petrel	Craig & Sons Ltd.	December 1959	19 February 1991
Grampian Pioneer	Craig & Sons Ltd.	1981	5 April 1991
Grampian Pride	Craig & Sons Ltd.	1981	14 April 1991
Grampian Princess	Craig & Sons Ltd.	March 1960	30 December 1991
Grampian Protector	Craig & Sons Ltd.	1983	14 January 1992
Grampian Quest	Craig & Sons Ltd.	May 1959	30 April 1991
Grampian Rose	Craig & Sons Ltd.	1949	14 January 1992
Grampian Shield	Craig & Sons Ltd.	November 1974	28 March 1991
Grampian Sprite	Craig & Sons Ltd.	1982	18 March 1991
Grampian Star	Craig & Sons Ltd.	1971	17 September 1991
Grampian Sword	Craig & Sons Ltd.	October 1976	21 October 1991
Grampian Venture	Craig & Sons Ltd.	1982	27 December 1991
Grampian Viking	Craig & Sons Ltd.	May 1961	11 June 1991
Grampian Warrior	Grey Ward Partnership	February 1977	14 January 1992
Hatherleigh	Putford Enterprises	May 1961	19 June 1991
Kronbas	Kronbas	1975	13 February 1992
Maersk Mariner	Maersk Co.	May 1986	6 January 1992
Maersk Ranger	Lunar Finance	June 1980	15 April 1991
Maersk Rover	Maersk Co.	June 1982	30 December 1991
Maersk Runner	Maersk Co.	March 1980	17 April 1991
Mary Craig	Craig & Sons Ltd.	March 1959	27 May 1991
Normand Skipper	Solstad Shipping	1975	30 December 1991
Oakleigh	Putford Enterprises	September 1961	11 June 1991
Putford Achates	Putford Enterprises	June 1976	10 April 1991

Name	Owner	Date of registration[1]	Date of last inspection
Putford Achilles	Putford Enterprises	November 1973	3 January 1992
Putford Ajax	Putford Enterprises	September 1976	10 January 1992
Putford Apollo	Putford Enterprises	1975	9 January 1992
Putford Harrier	Putford Enterprises	February 1960	2 April 1991
Putford Merlin	Putford Enterprises	April 1962	6 March 1991
Putford Osprey	Putford Enterprises	May 1960	3 July 1991
Putford Petrel	Putford Enterprises	March 1961	3 January 1992
Putford Skua	Putford Enterprises	June 1967	16 April 1991
Putford Snipe	Putford Enterprises	December 1969	3 January 1992
Putford Teal	Putford Enterprises	March 1969	25 June 1991
Safe Protector	Safe Truck Shipping	1974	17 April 1991
Safe Transporter	Sunset Shipping	July 1971	15 October 1991
Safe Truck	Safe Truck Shipping	1976	3 April 1991
Scott Protector	Ondur Shipping	1984	3 December 1991
Seaboard Capella	Sunset Shipping	1968	24 May 1991
Seaboard Castor	Seaboard Offshore	1947	23 December 1991
Seaboard Illustrious	Seaboard Offshore	September 1966	6 March 1991
Seaboard Implacable	Seaboard Offshore	June 1964	21 February 1991
Seaboard Integrity	Seaboard Offshore	December 1968	16 December 1991
Seaboard Intrepid	Seaboard Offshore	April 1968	16 December 1991
Seaboard Invincible	Seaboard Offshore	September 1970	16 December 1991
Seaboard Sapphire	Sunset Shipping	1980	21 March 1991
Seaboard Sceptre	Sunset Shipping	1981	25 January 1992
Seaboard Sentry	Sunset Shipping	1979	28 June 1991
Seaboard Skua	Sunset Shipping	1972	24 January 1992
Seaboard Snipe	Sunset Shipping	1972	10 July 1991
Seaboard Sovereign	Sunset Shipping	1979	21 March 1991
Seaboard Support	Sunset Shipping	1979	31 December 1991
Seaboard Supreme	Sunset Shipping	1981	21 May 1991
Seaboard Swallow	Sunset Shipping	1972	8 April 1991
Seaboard Swan	Sunset Shipping	October 1971	30 April 1991
Seaboard Swift	Sunset Shipping	1972	23 August 1991
Shetland Service	Offshore Marine	January 1973	29 July 1991
St. Anne	Colen Shipping Ltd.	September 1962	3 January 1992
St. Elizabeth	Colen Shipping Ltd.	July 1962	3 January 1992
St. Kitts	Colne Shipping Ltd.	March 1964	20 December 1991
St. Louis	Colne Shipping Ltd.	June 1962	16 January 1992
St. Luke	Colne Shipping Ltd.	March 1961	8 January 1992
St. Patrick	Colne Shipping Ltd.	October 1975	10 January 1992
St. Paul	Colne Shipping Ltd.	November 1961	17 January 1992
St. Phillip	Colne Shipping Ltd.	February 1975	16 January 1992
Stirling Snipe	Stirling Shipping Co.	July 1982	22 May 1991
Stirling Teal	Stirling Shipping Co.	May 1982	9 May 1991
Tempest	Wijamuller BV	March 1977	25 July 1991
Togo	Golden Arrow Boats	October 1965	2 May 1991
Toisa Conqueror	Toisa Marine	December 1976	7 November 1991
Toisa Lynx	Toisa Marine	August 1983	21 February 1991
Toisa Panther	Toisa Marine	February 1984	19 July 1991
Toisa Petrel	Toisa Marine	1983	28 August 1991
Toisa Puffin	Toisa Marine	1980	17 September 1991
Toisa Teal	Screen Shipping	1981	16 January 1992
Toisa Tiger	Toisa Marine	April 1983	4 July 1991
Toisa Widgeon	Screen Shipping	1981	10 December 1991
Umberleigh	William H. I.	July 1960	19 July 1991
Veesea Emerald	Gem Shipping	1980	29 April 1991
Veesea Hurricane	Storm Shipping	1975	21 June 1991
Veesea Sapphire	Gem Shipping	1977	16 December 1991
Veesea Storm	Storm Shipping	1975	12 August 1991
Veesea Tempest	Storm Shipping	1974	21 November 1991
Veesea Topaz	Gem Shipping	1978	6 February 1992
Veesea Tornado	Storm Shipping	1974	7 February 1992
Veesea Typhoon	Typhoon Seas Ltd.	1976	7 February 1992
Woodleigh	Putford Enterprises	January 1960	3 January 1992

[1] Date of registration has been compiled from the official date of build.

Forth Ports Authority

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will detail his reasons for consenting to the public flotation of the Forth ports authority.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Forth ports authority submitted proposals to my right hon. and learned Friend for the privatisation of its undertaking by means of a flotation. My right hon. and learned Friend was satisfied that they were in accordance with the provisions of the Ports Act 1991. On this basis he was able to give the authority his consent in principle.

Shipping Report

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to implement the recommendations in the joint Government/industry working party report on "British Shipping: Challenges and Opportunities".

Mr. McLoughlin: The joint working party made five basic recommendations, covering simplification of the procedures and regulations surrounding registration; review of the nationality rules applying to officers on British ships; creation of a more flexible framework for registration law; continued pressure to secure liberalisation of cabotage, and a more competitive financial framework, in Europe; and emphasis on raising the profile, and revising the structure, of marine training.

Under the first of these, a number of changes have already been achieved, including the introduction of simplified procedures and regulations regarding the type approval of ships' equipment, and the establishment of arrangements under which surveyors in the British dependent territories can survey vessels on behalf of the United Kingdom where this is more convenient for the owners or operators of the vessels concerned.

We are also nearing completion of a review of the nationality requirements imposed on senior British Merchant Navy officers; and have continued to press for a more liberal competitive environment in Europe.

Changes to registration law need primary legislation, for which we are seeking an early opportunity. In the meantime, considerable preparatory work has already been undertaken.

The final recommendation, focussed on training, is primarily a matter for the shipping industry itself, although the Government are closely involved in a current review of the structure of seafarers' training and certification. The Chamber of Shipping last year produced a report setting out its wider thoughts on future training needs. It has also assured us that the industry continues to attach great importance to the subject.

Wick Airport

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to the implications for safety and the continuing viability of Wick airport in Caithness of the proposal to withdraw Meteorological Office observers from the airport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Operating arrangements at Wick airport are a matter for Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd., which I understand is considering whether to replace their Meteorological Office observer with an air traffic controller trained in meteorological observation, as has been done previously at some other United Kingdom airports. Whatever the outcome of these considerations, Wick airport will continue to meet the safety standards set by the Civil Aviation Authority. The viability of the airport is not in question.

Pilot Training

Sir Robin Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which pilot training organisations in the United Kingdom train pilots for flying in connection with agricultural operations; and whether his Department recognises such qualifications from any United Kingdom training facilities.

Mr. McLoughlin: I understand from the Civil Aviation Authority that in the United Kingdom pilots are not trained specifically in agricultural operations by pilot training organisations. Such training, which is tailored to the needs of the individual pilot, is carried out by the firms who provide aerial agricultural services, under the supervision of the CAA.

Before a pilot can carry out what are known as "aerial work" flights, such as crop spraying, he must hold a commercial pilot's licence granted by the CAA, and to use pesticides he must also hold a certificate of competence issued, in England and Wales, by the National Proficiency Test Council under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986.

Car Licences

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the income from provisional car licences in 1990-91; and what is the estimated income for 1991-92.

Mr. Chope: The income from provisional car licences in 1990-91 was £17·18 million.

The estimated income for the same source for 1991-92 is £17·8 million.

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the income from short-period licences and the renewal of licences by drivers of 70-plus years in 1991-92.

Mr. Chope: Short-period licences are issued only for medical reasons and there is no charge for their renewal either before or after aged 70. The estimated income in 1991-92 from three-yearly renewals by drivers over age 70 is £820,000.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Legal Aid

Mr. Michael Spicer: To ask the Attorney-General what information he has on the level of fees for legal aid work by solicitors, and the methods of their computation, in other EC countries.

The Attorney-General: Information on all legal aid payments to solicitors is held by the legal aid board or, in the case of Crown court work, by the Lord Chancellor's Department. Information on amounts paid can be provided by various case types. For example, the total of solicitors' costs for magistrates' court work in 1989-90 was £131 million, £300 per case, and in 1990-91 it was £152 million, £346 per case. If the hon. Member is interested in the level of a particular category of fee, the Lord Chancellor will arrange for him to be provided with the relevant information, if it is available. No detailed information is held on the computation of lawyers' fees for publicly funded work in other EC countries. I understand that expenditure on legal aid in France for last year was around 10 per cent. of expenditure in England and Wales; and that in Belgium is less than 1 per cent. Such comparisons are, however, difficult because the legal systems in these countries are different from our own.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Attorney-General how much has been spent on legal aid in each of the last five years; what was the average for civil and criminal legal aid bills in each year; and how many cases in each year were legally aided.

The Attorney-General: In each of the last five financial years, the amount spent on legal aid in England and Wales was:

£ million

	Gross	*Net*
1986-87	458	363
1987-88	537	434
1988-89	610	478
1989-90	715	569
1990-91	852	684

Information on average legal aid bills, covering the last five years, is set out in the table.

	1986-87 £	*1987-88* £	*1988-89* £	*1989-90* £	*1990-91* £
Average bills (Gross)					
Civil matrimonial	896	971	1,123	1,212	1,358
Civil non-matrimonial	1,075	1,200	1,399	1,594	1,784
Criminal[1]	245	281	309	349	398
Criminal[2]	360	408	453	525	599

[1] In magistrates court.
[2] In higher courts.

The number of acts of assistance paid for under the various legal aid schemes, including legal advice and assistance and the duty solicitor schemes, were as follows:

	1986-87 (000)	*1987-88 (000)*	*1988-89 (000)*	*1989-90 (000)*	*1990-91 (000)*
Acts of assistance	1,909	2,173	2,139	2,298	2,384

Political Asylum

Mr. Madden: To ask the Attorney-General what action he is taking to allocate more resources to enable delays in appeals against refusal to grant political asylum to be reduced; what is the average delay in such appeals being heard at the latest available date; and what was the average delay in such appeals at the comparable period in each of the last three years.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor's Department plans to increase by 10 per cent. the staffing resources available to the immigration appellate authorities (IAA) and to provide additional resources to improve existing accommodation and increase accommodation for the future. These measures will help the IAA to process more effectively all categories of immigration appeals including political asylum claims.

The IAA keep statistics for immigration cases generally, but do not record separate statistics for asylum cases. However, because of their importance, the IAA aim to give priority to asylum cases whenever possible. It is expected that the multi-terminal case-tracking system recently installed at Thanet house will enable the IAA to produce more detailed information.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Officers Association (Break-ins)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what progress has been made in the police inquiries into four break-ins into the headquarters of the Prison Officers Association;

(2) whether he will set up an inquiry into the recent burglaries of the headquarters of the Prison Officers Association.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. I will not set up an inquiry. The investigation of criminal offences is an operational matter for chief officers of police and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on this investigation while it was continuing.

Car Boot Sales

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the use of car boot sales as a means of disposing of stolen goods; and if he will bring forward proposals to deal with this.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There is no evidence that the majority of traders at car boot sales are anything other than law-abiding citizens. Adequate provision already exists in law to deal with those who use the sales as a means of disposing of stolen goods. It is an offence under section 22 of the Theft Act 1968 for a person to handle stolen goods if he knows or believes them to be so. This offence carries a maximum penalty of 14 years' imprisonment and an unlimited fine. I therefore have no intention of bringing forward proposals to deal specifically with this type of crime.

Community Service

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of offenders re-offended *(a)* while doing community service or *(b)* after community service in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. John Patten: The available information is published in Home Office statistical bulletins issue 18/83 "Reconvictions of those given Community Service Orders" (HSOB 34/86 "Reconvictions of those given Probation Orders" also refers to it) Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Of the 2,486 persons given CSOs 1278 (51 per cent.) were reconvicted within two years of the start of the order. Of these, 18 per cent. of the total were reconvicted during their CSO, 15 per cent. coincidental with the termination of their order and 18 per cent. after termination.

The reconviction rate rises to 59 per cent. after three years.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* community service sentences, *(b)* fines and *(c)* custodial sentences have been imposed by magistrates in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. John Patten: Information for 1990, which is provisional, is given in the table.

Number of offenders sentenced at magistrates courts for all offences by disposal 1990[1]

England and Wales	*(thousands)*
	[1]*1990*
Total sentenced	1,423·6
Community based:	83·4
Community service order	27·1
Fully suspended sentence	13·3
Probation order	36·7
Supervision order	6·3
Fine	1,184·5
Custodial sentences:	19·7
Partly suspended imprisonment	0·2
Unsuspended imprisonment	13·0
Young offender institution	6·5
Other	136·0

[1] Provisional

Drug Seizures, Durham

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drug seizures and prosecutions have taken place in the Durham constabulary area in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will list the type of drugs involved.

Mr. John Patten: Information on seizures of drug type made by the Durham constabulary is given in table A1.3 of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Statistics of the misuse of drugs: seizures and offenders dealt with, United Kingdom, 1990" (area table), a copy of which is in the Library.

The information regarding prosecutions and drugs involved is given in the table.

Persons dealt with at court for drugs offences by type of drug, 1990: Durham Constabulary

Durham	*Number of persons*
Total persons	[1]62
Cannabis	43
LSD	9
Heroin	4
Amphetamine	4
Cocaine	1
Other drugs	2

[1] Of which 61 found guilty.
Rows do not add to total because a person can be dealt with for offences involving more than one drug type.

Foundation for Business Responsibilities

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a further statement about the enquiries by the Charity Commissioners into the activities of the Foundation for Business Responsibilities.

Mr. John Patten: Following allegations made in an article in *The Observer* on 17 November 1991, the trustees of the Foundation for Business Responsibilities have supplied the Charity Commissioners with information about the activities of the charity and its expenditure and receipts. The commissioners have met the chairman of the trustees and have also been in touch with the charity's auditors and inspected the charity's records.

The Charity Commissioners' inquiries have not yet been concluded.

Immigration

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigrants have entered the United Kingdom each year since 1979; and if he will state in each year the countries from which most originated.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information on persons accepted for settlement in the United Kingdom in the years 1979-90, by nationality, is given in tables 22 and 14, respectively, of the 1987 and 1990 volumes of the annual Home Office Command Paper "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom" (Cm 415 and Cm 1571). These figures are of persons subject to immigration control who are granted indefinite leave to remain here.

Information on a different basis is produced by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys from the international passenger survey. This defines a migrant to the United Kingdom as a person who has been resident abroad for more than a year, and who on entry states the intention of residing here for a year or more. This information includes British citizens. The appropriate estimates for 1979-90 are given in the 1988 and 1990 issues of the OPCS publication "International Migration" (series MN, Nos. 15 and 17 respectively) in tables 2.1 and 2.5. These figures exclude migration between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

Copies of the above publications are in the Library. Information for 1991 is not yet available.

Prisoners

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what research he has done on the effects of mixing unconvicted and convicted prisoners; and what information he has on the practice of other countries on this matter;

(2) what representations he has had objecting to the proposed mixing of unconvicted and convicted prisoners in Preston and other prisons; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) has drawn to my attention the views expressed by the secretary of the Preston branch of the Prison Officers Association. These views have also been expressed by the branch at their meetings with management to discuss plans to increase the use of accommodation in the prison.

The prison rules 1964 provide that unconvicted prisoners should be kept out of contact with convicted prisoners as far as this can reasonably be done, and provided that the policy should not require a prisoner to be deprived unduly of the society of other prisoners. Most local prisons in England and Wales sensibly operate a degree of mixing to enable them to accommodate the inmates remanded or committed to custody by the courts in their catchment areas. This makes obvious sense, particularly where it avoids the need to hold prisoners in police cells, which are entirely unsuitable for the purpose. In some local prisons the regime for those on remand is improved by mixing with those who are convicted.

As regards practice in other countries, I understand that in a large number the separation of the convicted from the unconvicted is not regarded as obligatory.

Bail Offenders

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the results of his survey of research on reoffending while on bail; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) on 6 February 1992.

Poll Tax

Mr. Enright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have had legal proceedings arising from poll tax legislation commenced against them.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available from magistrates courts records in the form sought. About 11 million summonses have been issued alleging non-payment of community charge during the period 1 April 1990 to 31 December 1991, but some will have involved the same persons in respect of separate financial years.

Skateboarding Byelaws

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the local authorities who have now adopted the model byelaw relating to the use of skateboards on pavements, roads and footpaths; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since 1978, the Home Office has offered local authorities a model byelaw which prohibits the use of skateboards and roller skates on footways and carriageways to the danger of other persons lawfully using the footway or carriageway. In 1990, the model byelaw was modified to make it an offence for a person using a skateboard or roller skates to cause not only danger but also nuisance or reasonable grounds for annoyance to other persons using the footway or carriageway.

Our records indicate that 66 local authorities have adopted the 1978 model byelaws, and that to date one local authority has adopted the 1990 model wording. The local authorities are:

(a) Authorities which have adopted the 1978 model byelaws:

Adure district council
Arun district council
Babergh district council
Beverley district council
Birmingham district council
Bracknell district council
Broxbourne borough council
Bury borough council
Calderdale borough council
Caradon district council
Chelmsford borough council
Chichester district council
Colchester borough council
Congleton borough council
Dover district council
Fareham borough council
Gosport borough council
Gravesham borough council
Great Yarmouth borough council
Guildford borough council
Hart district council
Hastings borough council
Horsham district council
Isles of Scilly council
Kettering borough council
Leeds city council
Lichfield district council
Luton borough council
Maldon district council
Melton district council
Mid Sussex district council
Montgomeryshire district council
Newcastle-under-Lyme borough council
Newport borough council
North devon district council
Peterborough city council
Poole borough council
Reading borough council
Reigate and Banstead borough council
Rhymney Valley district council
Rother district council
Salisbury district council
Scarborough borough council
Sedgemoor district council
Shepway district council
Slough borough council
Southampton city council
Southend-on-Sea borough council
South Lakeland district council
South Northamptonshire district council
South Shropshire district council
South Tyneside borough council
South Wight borough council
Stoke-on-Trent city council
Sutton borough council
Tendring district council
Thanet district council
Tunbridge Wells borough council
Warrington borough council
Wokingham district council
Woodspring district council
Worcester city council
Worthing borough council
Wrexham Maglor borough council
Wychavon district council
Wycombe district council

(b) Authorities which have adopted the 1990 model byelaws:

Stratford-on-Avon district council

Metropolitan Police (Community Events)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether it is the usual practice for the Metropolitan police to charge for attendance at community and charity events;

(2) what has been the total cost of the policing of the Notting Hill carnival in each of the last three years; and what contribution towards that cost was made by the carnival organisers in each of those years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that it is not the usual practice to charge for police attendance at community and charity events.

The estimated additional costs of policing the Notting Hill carnival were:

Year	*Additional costs* £
1989	1,111,000
1990	1,606,000
1991	1,554,000

The carnival organisers have made no contribution towards the cost of policing this event.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Catalytic Converters

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which EC countries currently offer fiscal incentives for the purchase of three-way catalytic converters; what taxes are levied in the United Kingdom on sales of catalytic converters and at what rate; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In the United Kingdom, VAT is levied on sales of catalytic converters at the standard rate of 17·5 per cent. I have no information on any fiscal incentives for the purchase of three-way catalytic converters in other EC countries.

Government Expenditure

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the expenditure in each year since 1979, in real and constant prices, of Government expenditure in *(a)* agriculture, forestry and fishing, *(b)* industrial development, *(c)* energy, *(d)* infrastructure, *(e)* environmental protection, *(f)* health, *(g)* social development and services, *(h)* earth and atmosphere, *(i)* advancement of knowledge, *(j)* civil space, *(k)* defence and *(l)* not elsewhere classified.

Mr. Mellor: The available information on general government expenditure by main function since 1978-79 is given, in cash and real terms, in tables 2·2 and 2·3 of the statistical supplement to the 1991 Autumn Statement (Cm. 1920). Corresponding information for the other areas of expenditure requested is not available or could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Unemployment and Redundancy Pay

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update the information on unemployment benefit and redundancy payments given in his answer of 27 July 1983, *Official Report*, columns *449-50*.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is as follows:

	(a) Total benefits paid to unemployed people[1] *(£ million cash)*	*(b) Total expenditure from the Redundancy Fund (£ million cash)*	*(c) (a) plus (b) as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product (Percentage)*
1983-84	5,440	427	1·9
1984-85	6,320	333	2·0
1985-86	6,960	344	2·0
1986-87	7,310	246	2·0
1987-88	6,650	81	1·6
1988-89	5,240	70	1·1
1989-90	4,310	66	0·9
1990-91	5,040	145	0·9
1991-92[2]	7,360	128	1·3

[1] Figures include unemployment benefit, principal income-related benefits and payments from the social fund to unemployed people and their families.
[2] Estimates in current published plans.

Pension Funds

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will bring up to date the information on the growth of pension and other funds given in his answer of 7 March 1984, *Official Report*, column *581*.

Mr. Maples: The latest annual estimates for the period 1982 to 1990, the latest year for which a figure is available, are given below. Updated figures for earlier periods are available on the CSO database, series AALV, which can be accessed through the House of Commons Library.

Life Assurance and Pensions Schemes
Net increase in amount available for investment

	£ million
1982	14,980
1983	15,938
1984	18,518
1985	19,538
1986	20,510
1987	20,840
1988	22,659
1989	30,505
1990	33,655

Mortgage Subsidies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to prohibit the payment of mortgage subsidies by banks and other lenders to their employees; and what is his estimate of the gross value of such subsidies.

Mr. Maude: No. I have no firm data on the gross value of these particular subsidies, although the total net taxable value of beneficial loans made by all employers is estimated to be about £180 million in 1991-92.

Food (VAT)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the zero-rating for VAT of those items of food which are currently zero-rated is safeguarded until at least December 1996.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Yes.

Wines (Excise Duty)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy with regard to the minimum level of excise duty on *(a)* still table wine and *(b)* sparkling wine, that should be applied within the European Community.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The United Kingdom has consistently argued that it does not consider centrally determined duty rates as necessary for the completion of the single market, and that member states should be free to set their own rates of duty. The Government are prepared to accept a minimum zero rate for both still and sparkling wines, provided that wine is treated as an excisable product and remains within the control system for intra-EC movements of goods subject to excise duties.

Tax Rates

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the value of the main tax reliefs and allowances and the saving that would occur if these were restricted to the basic rate of tax.

Mr. Maude: A table showing the cost of direct tax allowances and reliefs in 1991-92 was given in appendix D of the Autumn Statement statistical supplement Cm 1920 published in January 1992.

It is estimated that the yield from restricting all of the main income tax allowances and reliefs to the basic rate would be some £2 billion at 1991-92 levels of income.

Inward Investment

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the inward investment by the United Kingdom from *(a)* Japan, *(b)* the United States of America and *(c)* Korea, for each year from 1978 to 1991, (i) in real terms at 1991 prices, (ii) as a proportion of total capital investment in the United Kingdom and (iii) as a proportion of total capital investment in the EC.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 13 February 1992]:* The information available on net inward investment in the United Kingdom by Japanese and United States companies is expressed at 1990 prices by adjusting the actual investment by the changes in the latest available implied gross domestic product deflator; and as a percentage of total investment by all other countries in the United Kingdom.

Information for investment in 1990 will be available in the next month or so. Information for investment by Korea is not available.

Year	*Japanese net investment (£ million, 1990 prices)*	*Per cent.*	*US net investment (£ million, 1990 prices)*	*Per cent.*
1978	−10	—	321	64·2
1979	23	2·9	452	57·1
1980	8	0·6	1,039	75·2
1981	105	17·7	71	11·9
1982	−31	—	206	27·9
1983	117	8·2	775	54·8
1984	−4	—	1,079	—
1985	94	3·3	1,282	44·8
1986	34	0·9	989	26·1
1987	657	10·0	1,018	15·4
1988	768	8·9	375	4·4
1989	1,121	7·3	5,344	34·8

Source: Central Statistical Office

Notes:

1. Net investment comprises investment less disinvestment and includes unremitted profits as net investment.
2. A minus sign indicates net disinvestment. In 1984 there was overall a net disinvestment by overseas companies in the UK.
3. Data prior to 1984 exclude oil companies.

Fully comparable information on direct inward investment in the European Community (EC) from outside the EC is not available. However, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development estimates of United States and Japanese direct investment in the UK as a percentage of direct investment in all EC countries show:

Percentage

Years	*United States*	*Japan*
1982-84	53	19
1985-87	34	34
1988-89	62	42

Merchant Shipping

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list policies of a financial nature which have been pursued by Her Majesty's Government since 1979 which have been of assistance to the United Kingdom merchant fleet.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* The list sets out the financial measures which have been of particular assistance to the shipping industry since 1979.

1. *Writing-down allowances*

In 1985 the capital allowance rules were changed to allow capital expenditure to be written down for tax purposes from the date on which it was incurred rather than from the time the asset was brought into use. These new arrangements are of particular importance for ships where stage payments are normally made as construction proceeds. Also in 1985, the special rules which provide that writing down allowances for ships can be used more flexibly than those for other forms of capital expenditure were extended to second-hand ships—previously they applied only to new ships.

2. *Business expansion scheme*

In 1986 the business expansion scheme was extended to include ship chartering as a qualifying activity. Ship operating and chartering companies have an annual finance limit of £5 million (as do private rented housing companies) instead of the £750,000 limit for other trading companies.

3. *Foreign earnings deduction for seafarers*

In 1988 the length of time which seafarers may spend in tehe United Kingdom without losing foreign earnings deductions was extended from 62 days, which is still the concession allowed to other workers with a significant overseas component to their jobs, to 90 days. In 1991 the concession for seafarers was extended to 183 days.

4. *Training and crew relief costs*

The 1988 Merchant Shipping Bill introduced two schemes to help the industry:

(a) Government assistance for training (GAFT), under which the Government provides funds equivalent to half the cost of training officer cadets. The budget for GAFT is about £3·5 million per annum.

(b) The crew relief costs scheme, under which the Government assists with the costs of transporting United Kingdom-based crews to and from United Kingdom-flagged vessels in distant waters. The budget for this scheme is about £5 million per annum.

Children's Car Seats

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total revenue from value added tax on children's car seats in motor cars in each of the last three years.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 18 February 1992]:* I regret that information on which to base an estimate is not available.

ENERGY

Mine Gas Escapes

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what inquiries his Department has made into the leakage of methane gas from closed coal mines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None. I am, however, aware that the Department of the Environment is commissioning research into methane from abandoned coal mines. My Department is sponsoring a review by the Watt committee of measurement methods and available data relating to methane emissions from various sources.

Energy Single Market

Mr. Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what progress has been made by EC member states towards providing for a single market in energy services with respect in particular to the free cross-border transmission of energy, the permitting of cross-border investment by one energy company in another, and third party access to a European-wide transmission network.

Mr. Wakeham: The European Commission adopted proposals on 22 January which represent the second phase of the internal energy market. The United Kingdom fully supports the Commission's proposals which, if adopted by the Council, will represent a significant liberalisation of the European Community's electricity and gas sectors. Copies of the proposals will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses shortly.

EMPLOYMENT

Travel-to-work Areas

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list the travel-to-work areas which do not have assisted area status where the unemployment is higher than in the Bridlington and Driffield travel-to-work area;

(2) if he will list the assisted areas which have a lower unemployment rate than the Bridlington and Driffield travel-to-work area.

Mr. Jackson: Information on unemployment rates by travel-to-work areas is available, on the unadjusted basis only, from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Women's Earnings

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate the number of women who have earnings below *(a)* the tax threshold and *(b)* the national insurance threshold, broken down into married women, lone parents and single women at the latest date.

Mr. Forth: Broad estimates, based on the new earnings survey and estimates of the number of employees in employment, are that in April 1991 there were 2½ million women employees earning less than the PAYE threshold, of whom 2¼ million earned less than the national insurance lower earnings limit. Using projections from the family expenditure survey, it is estimated that approximately 75 per cent. of each of these categories were married women, 5 per cent. lone parents and 20 per cent. single women.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Residential Special Schools

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to enable residential special schools to opt out of local authority control.

Mr. Fallon: We have no such plans.

Budget Shortfall, Staffordshire

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will meet leaders of Staffordshire county council and head teachers to discuss the remaining shortfall on the education budget arising out of the teachers' pay award.

Mr. Fallon: No. The additional grant which the Government propose to make available, together with the 7·1 per cent. increase in education spending allowed for in the 1992-93 local authority spending finance settlement, should give authorities adequate headroom to cover the cost of the teachers' pay award in full.

BCCI

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science which universities held accounts with the Bank of Commerce and Credit International; and how much money was lost by each university at its collapse.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Detailed information on universities' investments is not held centrally. Monitoring of the financial position of institutions is a matter for the Universities Funding Council. The council understands that no university had invested its own funds in the Bank of Commerce and Credit International.

Further Education

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what were the average unit costs for salaries and other recurrent expenditure categories *(a)* in further education institutions and *(b)* in sixth form colleges for the academic years 1988-89 and 1989-90; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Information on expenditure and per student spending is collected on a financial year basis. For the financial years 1988-89 and 1989-90, spending per student in further education institutions was as shown in the table. Information on actual spending in sixth form colleges was not collected separately.

Net institutional expenditure per full time equivalent student	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
	£	£
Salaries and wages	2,360	2,335
Other recurrent institutional costs	500	450
Total	2,860	2,785

Notes:
1. The expenditure data used to derive these figures cover all college-based recurrent spending including teaching and non-teaching staff salaries, premises costs, equipment and supplies, less sales and other miscellaneous receipts but not tuition fees income. They exclude spending on central administration and support services such as transport, as well as all capital expenditure.
2. The figures are derived from LEAs' returns of their spending to the Department of the Environment and of their student enrolments to the Department of Education and Science.
3. 1988-89 data include but 1989-90 data exclude students and expenditure for establishments which transferred to the FCFC sector.

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the average class size *(a)* in further education institutions and *(b)* in sixth form colleges for the academic years 1988-89 and 1989-90.

Mr. Eggar: The average class sizes were:

	1988-89	*1989-90*
Further education institutions[1]	14·5	14·7
Sixth form colleges	12·8	12·6

[1] Includes LEA maintained further education and tertiary colleges.

Primary School Places

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the methodology adopted by Surrey county council for forecasting future demand for primary school places carried out for their current age of transfer reorganisation proposals; what are his Department's guidelines on the methodology to be used; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: The reorganisation proposals published by Surrey county council will be decided by my right hon. and learned Friend. As they are currently being considered, we cannot comment at this stage on any of the issues involved, including Surrey's forecasting methodology, as this could be held to have pre-judged our eventual decision.

The Department's guidelines on how authorities should approach the publication of statutory proposals are contained within circular 3/87 "Providing for Quality: The Pattern of Organisation to Age 19", a copy of which is available in the Library. Annex 2 provides guidelines on forecasting pupil numbers.

Special Needs Pupils

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) how many pupils in each local education authority are recorded on form SEN 2 as having statements of special educational need and attending maintained special schools;

(2) how many pupils in each local education authority are recorded on form SEN 2 as having special educational needs and are attending maintained primary, middle and secondary schools;

(3) how many pupils in each local education authority are recorded on form SEN 2 as having special educational needs and are attending non-maintained and independent special schools under arrangements made by the local education authority.

Mr. Fallon: Form SEN2 for 1991 asked LEAs to record information on the placements arranged for children for whom statements of special educational needs were newly made in 1990. Details as submitted by LEAs in respect of the placements made for these children at maintained special schools, ordinary schools, non-maintained special schools and independent schools are given in the table.

Placements made for children with statements newly made in 1990

	Maintained		*Non-maintained*	
	ordinary schools	*special schools*	*special schools*	*independent schools*
Inner London Boroughs				
City	0	0	0	0
Camden	47	56	10	0
Greenwich	103	111	3	0
Hackney	49	83	11	0
Hammersmith	19	30	0	2
Islington	27	61	0	0
Kensington	16	27	4	1
Lambeth	112	133	0	5
Lewisham	13	28	2	0
Southwark	56	69	2	0
Tower Hamlets	17	31	2	0
Wandsworth	34	23	1	12
Westminster	42	52	0	12
Outer London Boroughs				
Barking	49	14	1	1
Barnet	29	48	5	1
Bexley	115	66	2	19
Brent	15	20	0	2
Bromley	81	35	2	7
Croydon	46	55	1	17
Ealing	17	59	13	25
Enfield	9	6	1	3
Haringey	34	28	2	8
Harrow	59	11	0	4
Havering	81	18	4	3
Hillingdon	30	28	4	11
Hounslow	175	56	0	4
Kingston-upon-Thames	40	25	0	3
Merton	49	37	0	2
Newham	55	43	0	1
Redbridge	28	46	5	3
Richmond-upon-Thames	53	14	0	1
Sutton	62	28	1	2
Waltham Forest	47	49	0	1
West Midlands				
Birmingham	34	259	0	11
Coventry	15	133	0	1
Dudley	42	8	1	4
Sandwell	6	45	0	0
Solihull	26	93	0	0
Walsall	89	59	1	3
Wolverhampton	78	33	0	0
Merseyside				
Knowsley	57	124	4	6
Liverpool	68	501	17	4
St. Helens	75	48	11	2
Sefton	70	74	2	20
Wirral	47	76	3	7
Greater Manchester				
Bolton	43	60	5	0
Bury	105	29	7	0
Manchester	14	84	8	6
Oldham	158	47	0	4
Rochdale	68	87	0	2
Salford	40	19	1	1
Stockport	199	44	0	1
Tameside	62	43	0	1
Trafford	65	56	2	1
Wigan	47	253	3	0
South Yorkshire				
Barnsley	83	9	3	0
Doncaster	55	90	11	6
Rotherham	120	113	31	0
Sheffield	3	122	0	0
West Yorkshire				
Bradford	38	36	1	0
Calderdale	43	1	1	0
Kirklees	171	63	1	0

	Maintained ordinary schools	Maintained special schools	Non-maintained special schools	Non-maintained independent schools
Leeds	249	65	0	3
Wakefield	23	47	2	6
Tyne and Wear				
Gateshead	48	34	0	2
Newcastle upon Tyne	38	58	4	2
North Tyneside	97	54	1	13
South Tyneside	39	31	2	2
Sunderland	62	74	3	0
English counties				
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0
Avon	77	241	3	12
Bedfordshire	117	135	5	7
Berkshire	246	245	4	2
Buckinghamshire	403	202	23	16
Cambridgeshire	62	48	1	0
Cheshire	428	112	5	6
Cleveland	156	173	2	6
Cornwall	241	2	0	2
Cumbria	292	21	1	1
Derbyshire	646	78	0	8
Devon	569	188	12	19
Dorset	111	134	20	9
Durham	67	66	12	2
East Sussex	48	149	21	19
Essex	263	263	8	20
Gloucestershire	141	125	3	8
Hampshire	589	379	41	13
Hereford and Worcester	149	194	7	11
Hertfordshire	181	341	8	44
Humberside	89	97	5	5
Isle of Wight	25	19	2	0
Kent	413	440	27	46
Lancashire	640	305	39	66
Leicestershire	271	175	4	4
Lincolnshire	417	216	16	16
Norfolk	400	83	5	11
North Yorkshire	221	75	8	6
Northamptonshire	91	121	0	4
Northumberland	153	3	3	2
Nottinghamshire	45	157	0	6
Oxfordshire	47	83	4	3
Shropshire	366	59	1	1
Somerset	89	52	12	16
Staffordshire	196	326	2	5
Suffolk	344	58	5	4
Surrey	203	189	29	5
Warwickshire	85	145	6	9
West Sussex	63	159	25	18
Wiltshire	536	63	7	37

Note. Figures are provisional.

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many pupils in each local education authority attend non-maintained and independent schools for the purposes of special educational treatment.

Mr. Fallon: The table sets out the number of pupils in each authority who were attending non-maintained and independent schools in Janaury 1991 for the purposes of special educational treatment.

	Number[1] of pupils[2] at non-maintained special schools	Number[1] of pupils[2] at independent schools receiving special educational treatment
City	0	0
Camden	31	2
Greenwich	2	33
Hackney	10	29
Hammersmith	20	11
Islington	9	17
Kensington	10	6
Lambeth	37	0
Lewisham	15	22
Southwark	4	28
Tower Hamlets	0	0
Wandsworth	13	43
Westminster	4	31
Barking	16	9
Barnet	45	59
Bexley	44	63
Brent	32	47
Bromley	46	44

	Number[1] of pupils[2] at non-maintained special schools	Number[1] of pupils[2] at independent schools receiving special educational treatment
Croydon	37	139
Ealing	81	104
Enfield	22	47
Haringey	19	49
Harrow	61	6
Havering	36	26
Hillingdon	34	71
Hounslow	25	43
Kingston-upon-Thames	15	66
Merton	12	32
Newham	22	16
Redbridge	68	35
Richmond-upon-Thames	4	22
Sutton	14	51
Waltham Forest	14	8
Birmingham	25	70
Coventry	14	13
Dudley	12	29
Sandwell	19	10
Solihull	2	30
Walsall	9	10
Wolverhampton	6	25
Knowsley	17	12
Liverpool	77	12
St. Helens	66	19
Sefton	46	73
Wirral	59	63
Bolton	50	8
Bury	46	1
Manchester	91	19
Oldham	39	0
Rochdale	17	23
Salford	8	8
Stockport	51	58
Tameside	17	0
Trafford	33	16
Wigan	115	35
Barnsley	18	0
Doncaster	46	17
Rotherham	121	0
Sheffield	2	8
Bradford	42	0
Calderdale	9	19
Kirklees	47	14
Leeds	3	11
Wakefield	49	39
Gateshead	33	14
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	37	15
North Tyneside	24	40
South Tyneside	26	18
Sunderland	48	8
Isles of Scilly	1	18
Avon	18	190
Bedfordshire	61	85
Berkshire	152	96
Buckinghamshire	67	123
Cambridge	0	64
Cheshire	188	91
Cleveland	40	36
Cornwall	19	66
Cumbria	38	49
Derbyshire	79	47
Devon	178	155
Dorset	175	44
Durham	30	73
East Sussex	0	0
Essex	175	286
Gloucestershire	90	33
Hampshire	276	283
Hereford and Worcester	50	67
Hertfordshire	47	253
Humberside	68	41
Isle of Wight	34	3
Kent	279	347
Lancashire	233	220
Leicestershire	25	46
Lincolnshire	32	135
Norfolk	41	85
North Yorkshire	83	54
Northamptonshire	34	61
Northumberland	37	13
Nottinghamshire	53	90
Oxfordshire	52	33
Shropshire	23	24
Somerset	70	76
Staffordshire	8	39
Suffolk	68	105
Surrey	198	83
Warwickshire	63	50
West Sussex	195	109
Wiltshire	106	211
Total for England	5,512	5,780

[1] As recorded in returns to the Department of Education and Science.

[2] Pupils aged five and over (as at 31 August 1990) for whom the local education authority was paying full tuition fees.

Pupil Statistics

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many full-time pupils of all ages there are, for each local education authority in England, in maintained primary, middle and secondary schools.

Mr. Fallon: The numbers of full-time pupils of all ages, including pupils aged under five, in maintained primary, middle and secondary schools in each local education authority in England as at January 1991 are shown in the table.

All full-time pupils in maintained primary, middle and secondary schools in each local education authority in England—January 1991

	Primary	Middle	Secondary
201 City	202	—	—
202 Camden	9,482	—	9,891
203 Greenwich	18,322	—	13,470
204 Hackney	14,732	—	7,592
205 Hammersmith and Fulham	8,154	—	6,050
206 Islington	13,421	—	7,223
207 Kensington and Chelsea	5,922	—	3,539
208 Lambeth	17,283	—	5,955
209 Lewisham	17,725	—	11,428
210 Southwark	18,315	—	9,487
211 Tower Hamlets	18,134	—	10,751
212 Wandsworth	14,916	—	9,724

		Primary	Middle	Secondary
213	Westminster	8,535	—	7,043
301	Barking	13,479	—	8,673
302	Barnet	21,097	—	17,953
303	Bexley	17,007	—	14,048
304	Brent	19,782	—	10,941
305	Bromley	19,300	—	15,414
306	Croydon	24,356	—	15,420
307	Ealing	17,389	7,320	11,028
308	Enfield	20,765	—	15,958
309	Haringey	16,156	—	8,478
310	Harrow	12,373	5,470	7,819
311	Havering	18,179	—	15,626
312	Hillingdon	16,599	—	12,911
313	Hounslow	16,735	—	12,743
314	Kingston upon Thames	8,701	—	7,135
315	Merton	6,803	6,061	5,965
316	Newham	20,340	—	13,040
317	Redbridge	16,908	—	13,484
318	Richmond upon Thames	8,724	—	6,977
319	Sutton	10,986	—	10,365
320	Waltham Forest	16,877	—	11,780
330	Birmingham	97,329	3,251	62,589
331	Coventry	27,109	—	17,855
332	Dudley	26,566	307	15,727
333	Sandwell	26,954	—	18,181
334	Solihull	17,234	—	13,774
335	Walsall	24,199	—	18,234
336	Wolverhampton	21,138	—	15,264
340	Knowsley	15,740	—	8,941
341	Liverpool	44,394	—	28,765
342	St. Helens	15,894	—	12,416
343	Sefton	24,591	—	18,534
344	Wirral	28,897	—	20,800
350	Bolton	24,558	—	17,103
351	Bury	15,162	—	10,163
352	Manchester	42,612	—	23,957
353	Oldham	22,445	—	15,304
354	Rochdale	20,102	—	12,437
355	Salford	21,503	—	12,879
356	Stockport	23,746	—	17,333
357	Tameside	19,990	—	13,857
358	Trafford	17,597	—	10,731
359	Wigan	27,650	—	20,548
370	Barnsley	18,412	—	12,123
371	Doncaster	21,136	9,554	15,217
372	Rotherham	22,109	—	17,539
373	Sheffield	32,469	7,636	23,845
380	Bradford	33,740	23,685	20,210
381	Calderdale	17,799	—	12,519
382	Kirklees	31,549	3,322	22,713
383	Leeds	46,935	16,611	34,468
384	Wakefield	22,006	7,269	15,881
390	Gateshead	16,478	—	11,529
391	Newcastle upon Tyne	20,490	3,312	13,189
392	North Tyneside	13,760	5,461	9,268
393	South Tyneside	13,869	—	8,798
394	Sunderland	27,463	—	18,245
420	Isles of Scilly	170	—	112
901	Avon	74,040	—	52,513
902	Bedfordshire	35,921	17,104	26,507
903	Berkshire	52,519	5,186	42,839
904	Buckinghamshire	41,408	15,686	33,306
905	Cambridgeshire	55,930	168	39,831
906	Cheshire	83,207	—	63,195
907	Cleveland	55,223	—	38,784
908	Cornwall	36,350	—	28,416
909	Cumbria	40,126	—	30,370
910	Derbyshire	74,595	—	55,570
911	Devon	71,017	3,736	54,215
912	Dorset	35,783	11,137	30,588
913	Durham	51,341	—	36,386
914	East Sussex	44,746	—	33,689
915	Essex	118,566	—	96,169
916	Gloucestershire	41,521	—	31,658
917	Hampshire	102,463	21,366	82,259
918	Hereford and Worcester	43,697	15,027	34,196
919	Hertfordshire	73,713	3,111	61,618
920	Humberside	74,505	—	57,522

	Primary	Middle	Secondary
921 Isle of Wight	6,772	5,268	4,862
922 Kent	116,672	4,1[illegible]	92,468
923 Lancashire	122,442	—	82,332
924 Leicestershire	74,220	5,273	53,907
925 Lincolnshire	46,540	—	35,321
926 Norfolk	42,056	16,475	39,690
927 North Yorkshire	52,867	378	42,354
928 Northamptonshire	46,805	9,402	34,018
929 Northumberland	18,357	14,878	13,306
930 Nottinghamshire	76,473	2,710	59,332
931 Oxfordshire	37,044	4,092	28,775
932 Shropshire	32,545	—	26,538
933 Somerset	33,839	4,152	23,266
934 Staffordshire	86,935	6,580	60,634
935 Suffolk	39,336	16,043	30,287
936 Surrey	45,213	27,017	42,172
937 Warwickshire	29,008	14,432	24,511
938 West Sussex	41,723	9,687	37,641
939 Wiltshire	43,561	1,231	31,293
ENGLAND	3,630,573	333,526	2,671,297

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many full-time pupils of all ages there are in maintained special schools in each local education authority in England.

Mr. Fallon: The numbers of full-time pupils of all ages, including pupils aged under five, in maintained special schools in each local education authority in England as at January 1991 are shown in the table.

All full-time pupils in maintained special schools in each local Education Authority in England—January 1991[1]

	Full-time pupils in maintained special schools Numbers
201 City	—
202 Camden	371
203 Greenwich	755
204 Hackney	654
205 Hammersmith and Fulham	498
206 Islington	322
207 Kensington and Chelsea	97
208 Lambeth	906
209 Lewisham	491
210 Southwark	495
211 Tower Hamlets	495
212 Wandsworth	783
213 Westminster	163
301 Barking	162
302 Barnet	337
303 Bexley	269
304 Brent	370
305 Bromley	372
306 Croydon	497
307 Ealing	433
308 Enfield	411
309 Haringey	338
310 Harrow	222
311 Havering	237
312 Hillingdon	372
313 Hounslow	424
314 Kingston upon Thames	233
315 Merton	237
316 Newham	437
317 Redbridge	372
318 Richmond upon Thames	155
319 Sutton	291
320 Waltham Forest	757
330 Birmingham	2,889
331 Coventry	809
332 Dudley	570
333 Sandwell	845
334 Solihull	242
335 Walsall	553
336 Wolverhampton	498
340 Knowsley	627
341 Liverpool	1,558
342 St. Helens	478
343 Sefton	459
344 Wirral	719
350 Bolton	461
351 Bury	287
352 Manchester	1,509
353 Oldham	618
354 Rochdale	528
355 Salford	520
356 Stockport	432
357 Tameside	406
358 Trafford	370
359 Wigan	809
370 Barnsley	187
371 Doncaster	717
372 Rotherham	615
373 Sheffield	854
380 Bradford	873
381 Calderdale	209
382 Kirklees	644
383 Leeds	1,051
384 Wakefield	631
390 Gateshead	374
391 Newcastle upon Tyne	652
392 North Tyneside	404
393 South Tyneside	301
394 Sunderland	656
420 Isles of Scilly	—
901 Avon	1,993
902 Bedfordshire	1,086
903 Berkshire	1,518
904 Buckinghamshire	1,505
905 Cambridgeshire	954
906 Cheshire	1,418
907 Cleveland	1,317
908 Cornwall	296
909 Cumbria	348
910 Derbyshire	1,284
911 Devon	1,691
912 Dorset	1,059
913 Durham	1,045

		Full-time pupils in maintained special schools Numbers
914	East Sussex	1,330
915	Essex	2,512
916	Gloucestershire	1,202
917	Hampshire	3,491
918	Hereford and Worcester	1,271
919	Hertfordshire	1,820
920	Humberside	1,177
921	Isle of Wight	224
922	Kent	3,217
923	Lancashire	3,222
924	Leicestershire	1,069
925	Lincolnshire	1,135
926	Norfolk	859
927	North Yorkshire	1,009
928	Northamptonshire	1,091
929	Northumberland	546
930	Nottinghamshire	1,941
931	Oxfordshire	704
932	Shropshire	518
933	Somerset	589
934	Staffordshire	2,083
935	Suffolk	697
936	Surrey	1,729
937	Warwickshire	1,263
938	West Sussex	1,206
939	Wiltshire	699
	England	89,429

[1] Including pupils in maintained hospital schools.

St. Fidelis School, Erith

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will pay an official visit to St. Fidelis school in Erith to discuss the capital funding of the school and its proposed expansion.

Mr. Fallon: The capital funding of the proposed expansion project at St. Fidelis school will be one of the factors considered by my right hon. and learned Friend in his decision on proposals published by the governors, under section 13 of the 1980 Education Act, to enlarge the school significantly. It is not our practice to visit schools which are the subject of statutory proposals; but if we did, it would not be possible to discuss any of the issues involved, as this could be held to have pre-judged our eventual decision on the proposals.

Religious Education

Mr. Alison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the most recently available estimates for *(a)* the number of full-time teachers in county secondary schools who teach religious education and who have no post A-level qualification in RE, *(b)* the numbers of full-time teachers in county secondary schools who teach religious education and who have a post A-level qualification in RE and *(c)* the number of full-time county secondary teachers with a post A-level qualification in RE who are not teaching the subject.

Mr. Fallon: The information requested is not separately available for county secondary schools.

For all maintained secondary schools in England, the 1988 secondary school staffing survey showed that 14,500 full-time teachers were teaching religious education. Of these, 44 per cent. or 6,400 had a post A-level qualification in religious education. The remaining 56 per cent., or 8,100, who had no recorded post A-level qualification in the subject, were providing only 26 per cent. of all tuition periods in religious education. A further 6,900 full-time teachers with a post A-level qualification in religious education were not teaching the subject.

Mr. Alison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the local education authorities which have adopted agreed syllabuses for religious education since the commencement of the Education Reform Act 1988.

Mr. Eggar: The Department does not collect this information. We are aware, however, that some local education authorities have adopted new agreed syllabuses for religious education since 29 September 1988, including:

Bolton
Cornwall
Derbyshire
Ealing
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Newham
North Tyneside
Oldham
Rotherham

I believe that other authorities are currently reviewing their syllabuses.

Christian Worship

Mr. Alison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list for each local education authority *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of county schools granted total or partial exemption from the requirement to hold broadly Christian acts of worship.

Mr. Eggar: The information is not available in the form requested. I understand that, in the first year following the Education Reform Act 1988, 32 local education authorities reported that determinations had been granted in respect of one or more of their schools and that four LEAs have reported further determinations granted in the second year. I have requested some further analysis of the information which we have and will write to my hon. Friend in due course.

CD-ROM Technology

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he intends to offer financial assistance for CD-ROM applications for the blind and visually handicapped; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: Yes. My right hon. and learned Friend announced on 25 January a scheme to be jointly funded by the Department, the Royal National Institute for the Blind and the Open university to develop software to give blind and visually handicapped pupils full access to CD-ROM materials. The scheme is being managed by the National Council for Educational Technology.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he intends to offer further financial support for the CD-ROM application development scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: Yes. As part of the Government's scheme to introduce and extend the curriculum use of CD-ROM

technology in schools, the Department has invited the National Council for Educational Technology to commission the development of a number of new curriculum discs directly supporting the national curriculum. The Department is making £700,000 available towards the costs which will be shared with the disc developers and publishers.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Disaster Relief Unit

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral answer of 10 February 1992, *Official Report*, column 665, if he will give details of the activities of the emergency aid department, showing in which way its work differs from that of the disaster relief unit which it replaced.

Mrs. Chalker: I announced the creation of the ODA's emergency aid department on 14 August 1991. A copy of the announcement has been placed in the Library.

The emergency aid department incorporates the relief work of the disaster unit and the refugee unit and now has an additional section to deal with the new disaster relief initiative, disaster preparedness and the continuing humanitarian crisis in Iraq.

Honduras

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans for further assistance to the Government of Honduras.

Mrs. Chalker: We have agreed to convert the £5 million non-interest bearing loan 1980 to a grant. A formal agreement will be signed in due course with the Government of Honduras, waiving repayments over the period to 2011.

Population Control

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution Her Majesty's Government will make to the United Nations fund for population activities in 1992.

Mrs. Chalker: We will contribute £9 million to the United Nations fund for population activities in 1992. This is a 20 per cent. increase on our 1991 contribution of £7·5 million, which in turn represented an increase of 25 per cent. over the 1990 contribution of £6 million. Britain will, therefore, have increased its core support to UNFPA by 50 per cent. over the last two years.

Britain's commitment to population as a development priority is very clear, and we aim to further increase the resources available for population assistance under the United Kingdom aid programme. UNFPA will continue to be a major recipient of this assistance.

Cambodia

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution Her Majesty's Government have made to the World Food Programme appeal for internally displaced people in Cambodia.

Mrs. Chalker: I approved a contribution of £250,000 to the World Food Programme, specifically for the needs of the internally displaced people in Cambodia.

Overseas Development (Report)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain for the library of his Department's Overseas Development Administration the report, "Justice Between Peoples—Justice between Generations", published last December.

Mrs. Chalker *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* An order for this report has been placed with its publisher, the Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI) in Nairobi, and will be added to the library of the Overseas Development Administration in due course.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mr. and Mrs. Orton Chirwa

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to make further representations on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Orton Chirwa.

Mrs. Chalker: We will continue to raise the case of Orton and Vera Chirwa with the Malawian Government at every suitable opportunity until they are released.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Malawi to discuss the continuing imprisonment of Mr. and Mrs. Chirwa; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The Secretary of State has no plans to visit Malawi. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) on 13 February, column *605*.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the representations made by Her Majesty's Government to the Malawian Government concerning Mr. and Mrs. Orton Chirwa.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government made representations to the Malawian Government on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Chirwa in February and March 1984, October 1986, December 1987, July 1990, December 1991, January 1992 —three times—and February 1992.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department will support attempts by the hon. Member to seek to visit Mr. and Mrs. Orton Chirwa in prison in Malawi.

Mrs. Chalker: Any such visit would require the agreement of the Malawian Government. A response to a request by the EC and the United States Governments for access by the International Committee of the Red Cross to all Malawi's prisoners is currently awaited.

Chemical Weapons Organisation

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding the location of the seat of the

international organisation to be established under the chemical weapons convention, currently under negotiation in Geneva.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: On 26 November 1991, the Dutch ambassador delivered to the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office an aide-mémoire on The Hague's candidature to host the International Organisation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. On 3 February this year, the Austrian Foreign Minister gave a memorandum on Vienna's candidature to my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Croatia

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken to identify the source of the supplies of arms entering Croatia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Nations Security Council has established a committee to monitor military equipment entering Yugoslavia and its former constituent republics in violation of Security Council resolution 713 of 25 September 1991.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration his Department has given to the question of sanctions against Croatia since recognition, in addition to those already in force against Yugoslavia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: All aspects of our policy towards Croatia are under constant review.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, during the normal process of discussions with the German Government in the last 14 days, the matter of Croatia has been raised; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Croatia is regularly discussed both bilaterally with our community partners and multilaterally under European political co-operation.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department will take to ensure that the Government of Croatia adhere to every undertaking given to Her Majesty's Government and the European Community prior to the formal recognition of Croatia's independence.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have made it clear that the development of our relations with Croatia will depend on Croatia's fulfilling its undertakings on minorities' rights.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the Helsinki Watch report on Croatian attrocities against Serbs.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The report referred to has been ordered.

ENVIRONMENT

Countryside (Access)

3. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to improve access to the countryside.

Mr. Baldry: The rights of way network provides the means by which most people can visit and enjoy the countryside. We are strongly supporting the Countryside Commission in its work with local authorities to improve this network and to bring it all into good order by the year 2000. We have created incentives to landowners to provide greater opportunities for public access through the countryside stewardship scheme, and increased funds for the national park authorities to open up new areas for public enjoyment. We shall announce further measures shortly.

18. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to improve access to the countryside.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) earlier today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment.

Environmental Policies

16. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the application of environmental considerations to Government policy as a whole.

Mr. Heseltine: This Government have taken a world lead in integrating environmental policies across Departments. We have established two ministerial committees to develop and monitor environmental initiatives, created a "green" Minister in every Government Department and issued guidance which Departments must follow in assessing the environmental impacts of their policies and programmes. The environment remains high on the Government's agenda. We will continue to provide regular and full progress reports on the implementation of our commitments.

Ozone Layer

19. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent reports he has received about depletion of the ozone layer.

Mr. Trippier: Reports have been received from the European arctic stratospheric ozone experiment (EASOE) and from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. These show large quantities of ozone-depleting chemicals present in the stratosphere, and low concentrations of ozone have been observed over mid-latitudes of the northern hemisphere and in the tropics. It is not yet possible to say unequivocally that chemical depletion of ozone is taking place.

Carbon Tax

20. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will report on progress made with his European Community counterparts on agreements on a Communitywide carbon tax.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) on 17 December 1991, and to this morning's debate in European Standing Committee A.

NRA Board of Directors

21. **Dr Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has held discussions with the chairman of the National Rivers Authority concerning the reorganisation of the National Rivers Authority's board of directors.

Mr. Baldry: I discuss board appointments with the chairman of the National Rivers Authority whenever there is a need.

Water Pollution

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many water pollution incidents were the subject of prosecutions in each of the last three years; and what was the total amount levied in fines in each year.

Mr. Baldry: The numbers of successful prosecutions for pollution incidents in England and Wales, since the establishment of the National Rivers Authority, are shown, with the total fines imposed.

Period	*Total number of prosecutions*	*Fines (£000)*
1 September 1989 to 31 August 1990	395	[1]1,316
1 September 1990 to 31 August 1991	559	773
1 September 1991 to 30 November 1991	150	264

[1] Includes £1 million for Shell UK prosecution.

Prosecution figures are based on the date of the court hearing. Further information is contained in the NRA's report "Water Pollution Incidents in England and Wales 1990", which was published on 27 January. Prosecutions prior to 1 September 1989 would have been brought by the water authorities and comprehensive information is not readily available.

Tidiness

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of his measures to improve the tidiness of Britain.

Mr. Baldry: The message that is being received by my Department is that local authorities are responding positively to the new duty to keep their land clear of litter and to the other measures incorporated in part IV of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. I am sure that this is having a positive impact on the cleanliness of streets, parks and other places.

Housebuilding

17. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses were built by local authorities and by housing associations in 1991.

Sir George Young: Provisional estimates are that in England, in 1991, 14,600 dwellings were completed by housing associations and 7,800 by local authorities. Housing associations are now the main providers of new subsidised housing: they also provide housing by acquisition, renovation, conversion and other means, and their total output is expected to rise to over 50,000 by 1993-94.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the figures for housebuilding in the public sector in the current year to the latest available date; what was the comparable figure for 1978-79; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Provisional estimates are that in England, during the nine months April to December 1991, 5,500 dwellings were completed for local authorities, new towns and Government Departments and 11,900 for housing associations. In April to December 1978 the equivalent figures were 64,500 and 15,700. I also refer the hon. Member to the answer given today to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning.

Rural Housing

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will encourage the Housing Corporation to direct a higher proportion of its funds to rural areas.

Mr. Yeo: The Housing Corporation's rural programme is being steadily expanded from 1,500 homes this year to 1,850 in 1992-93 and 2,250 in 1993-94. In addition, the corporation has undertaken to make good this year and next a shortfall of over 700 homes against its target for 1990-91.

Air Quality

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on air quality.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to chapter 11 of the White Paper "This Common Inheritance" (Cm 1200) and to chapter 8 of "This Common Inheritance: The First Year Report" (Cm 1655). These give a full account of our progress in improving air quality and our commitments to further action.

Local Authorities (Unitary Plans)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the development of unitary plans by local authorities.

Sir George Young: One unitary development plan has been adopted. Other metropolitan authorities have plans in preparation.

Heveningham Hall

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on Heveningham hall.

Mr. Heseltine: No. I have nothing to add now to my answer to the hon. Member on 10 December, column *367*.

Redundant Farm Buildings

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue guidance to local planning authorities to allow for the granting of a greater proportion than hitherto of applications making use of redundant farm buildings.

Mr. Yeo: Guidance on the re-use of farm and other rural buildings is in planning policy guidance note 7, "The

Countryside and the Rural Economy", published in January 1992. This states that proposals should not be rejected unless there are specific and convincing planning reasons that cannot be overcome by attaching reasonable conditions to the planning permission. Unlike the first edition of PPG7, it says that it should not normally be necessary to consider whether the building is no longer needed for its present purposes.

Mixed Housing Developments

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to promote mixed housing developments of both public and private housing on local authority land; in what proportions; what the position was in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Right to buy, estate action, city challenge, housing action trusts and other initiatives introduced by this Government are already successfully promoting diversification of tenure in areas of local authority housing. Increased competition for housing investment programme resources and the requirement to develop housing strategies will further encourage local authorities to mix the tenure of estates. Details of sales of local authority land and buildings can be found in the quarterly housing and construction statistics published by my Department.

Recycling

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representation he has received from the Association of District Councils about recycling.

Mr. Baldry: The Government have frequent contact with local authorities and the local authority associations on a wide range of matters concerning recycling.

Council Estates

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how the Government are encouraging tenant participation in the management of council estates.

Sir George Young: The Department has increased its grants for the promotion and development of tenant management initiatives on local authority estates by over a third since last year. In addition, it has contributed towards the costs of developing the new national certificate in tenant participation and is grant-aiding moves to establish a national housing and tenant resource centre. Last week it began a national distribution of the tenant participation video and leaflet which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State launched with the council tenants charter.

East Thames Corridor

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the environmental impact of the development of the east Thames corridor.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend has appointed consultants to examine the opportunities for development in the east Thames corridor. They are considering also the potential for the environmental enhancement of the corridor and taking account of the need to conserve areas of historical and environmental sensitivity.

Planning and Development

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next intends to meet the European Commissioner for environmental matters to discuss planning and development matters.

Mr. Yeo: I discuss a wide range of issues, including planning and development matters whenever I meet the Commissioner. Following our meeting on 21 January, no further meeting has yet been arranged.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Carttiss: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the estimated savings made by local authorities as a result of compulsory competitive tendering; and what further savings could be made through its extension.

Mr. Key: Research has shown average savings of 6 per cent. in the annual value of contracts for all services subject to competition under the Local Government Act 1988. Higher average savings, in the range of 10 to 15 per cent. of annual value, have been achieved in the case of refuse collection and building cleaning. The Government believe that the demonstrable gains in efficiency and value for money stimulated by the introduction of competition should be extended to a wider range of local services.

SSAs

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the counties which have obtained a higher standard spending assessment settlement per unit of population in the current year than Warwickshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The following counties have a higher standard spending assessment expressed in pounds per adult than Warwickshire for 1991-92: Avon, Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Cleveland, Cornwall, Cumbria, Derbyshire, Devon, Durham, East Sussex, Essex, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Hereford and Worcester, Hertfordshire, Humberside, Isle of Wight, Kent, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Northumberland, North Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Somerset, Staffordshire, Suffolk and Wiltshire.

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will now direct his officials to have talks with local government officers in Warwickshire about the county's financial situation;

(2) what advice or assistance is available to county councils which represent to him that the results of the standard spending assessment formula are disadvantageous to them.

Mr. Portillo: When the provisional standard spending assessments were announced on 26 November, local authorities were invited to make representations up to 31 December. Ministers met delegations from local authorities up to 9 January.

The final standard spending assessment formulae for 1992-93 have now been approved by the House. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made clear his intentions with regard to charge capping. It is now for

Warwickshire and all other authorities to determine their budgets for 1992-93. It would not be appropriate for the Department to become involved in budgeting decisions. Any authority designated for capping will have the opportunity to make representations if it decides to challenge the level of the cap proposed by the Secretary of State.

Housing Revenue Accounts

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table of all local authorities in England, grouped regionally, showing the estimated notional deficit or surplus on their housing revenue account for 1991-92, if expenditure on rent rebates and subsidy towards those costs were excluded from the calculation of housing revenue accounts subsidy for that year but rents, debt repayment and management and management expenditure remained the same.

Mr. Yeo: I have arranged for the information to be placed in the Library of the House.

Pipelines

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the laying or construction of notifiable pipelines is granted permitted development rights under the Town and Country Planning and General Development Order 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Public gas suppliers within the meaning of section 7 of the Gas Act 1986 have permitted development rights under part 17F of schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988, including the laying underground of notifiable pipelines.

SSSIs

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sites if special scientific interest have been denotified in each yeaer since 1981; what was the total hectarage involved in each year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The information is not available in the form requested. Since 1981, the total area of land de-notified in England, primarily as the result of boundary amendments to existing SSSIs is 12,699·8 hectares involving 440 SSSIs.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sites of special scientific interest were visited under the site integrity monitoring programme for the latest 12-month period for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: In England, 1,597 SSSIs were visited in the period from 1 April to 31 December 1991. The aim is for all SSSIs to be covered by site integrity monitoring, with a visit to each site at least every three years.

Urban Programme Support, Hackney

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the projects in the London borough of Hackney which have received inner cities partnership or urban programme support in each year since 1987-88, showing in each case the level of support and the benefits obtained for local people.

Mr. Key: The Department has approved more than 400 projects under the Hackney urban programme—formerly called Hackney inner-city partnership—since 1987-88. Individual projects started each year within the Hackney urban programme (UP) are listed in annual reports available from Hackney council. Further details on UP funded projects are also available from the council.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the per capita levels of revenue support for the 10 local authorities which benefit most *(a)* in 1990-91, *(b)* in 1991-92 and *(c)* in 1992-93.

Mr. Key: The information requested is as follows:

1990-91 revenue support grant per capita for the 10 local authorities which benefit most

Local authority	*1990-91 revenue support grant (£/per capita)*
City of London	9,153
Tower Hamlets	824
Hackney	804
Lambeth	708
Westminster	689
Islington	633
Newham	621
Southwark	579
Isles of Scilly	573
Hammersmith and Fulham	560

1991-92 revenue support grant per capita for the 10 local authorities which benefit most

Local authority	*1991-92 revenue support grant (£/per capita)*
City of London	9,420
Tower Hamlets	968
Hackney	939
Lambeth	844
Westminster	781
Islington	755
Newham	736
Southwark	681
Isles of Scilly	608
Hammersmith and Fulham	636

1992-93 revenue support grant per capita for the 10 local authorities which benefit most

Local authority	*1992-93 revenue support grant (£/per capita)*
City of London	10,771
Tower Hamlets	1,154
Hackney	1,127
Lambeth	1,014
Westminster	959
Islington	942
Newham	940
Southwark	841
Isles of Scilly	853
Hammersmith and Fulham	821

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the per capita levels of housing revenue support for the 10 local authorities which benefit most *(a)* in 1990-91, *(b)* in 1991-92 and *(c)* in 1992-93.

Mr. Yeo: The information requested on housing revenue account (HRA) subsidy paid to English local housing authorities is shown in the following tables.

	HRA subsidy claimed 1990-91	*HRA subsidy claimed per dwelling 1990-91*
Islington	139,842,857	3,546
Lambeth	123,663,328	2,493
Hackney	118,239,274	2,549
Manchester	116,383,231	1,233
Camden	107,762,567	3,143
Birmingham	101,344,460	907
Southwark	100,665,746	1,723
Tower Hamlets	97,382,040	2,307
Liverpool	76,015,000	1,264
Haringey	71,166,800	3,008

	HRA subsidy claimed 1991-92	*HRA subsidy claimed per dwelling 1991-92*
Manchester	139,755,197	1,519
Islington	138,230,866	3,553
Lambeth	136,532,184	2,886
Hackney	117,054,424	2,591
Southwark	112,149,017	1,948
Tower Hamlets	108,001,909	2,621
Camden	107,920,526	3,299
Birmingham	107,433,312	978
Liverpool	82,944,395	1,424
Sheffield	77,842,210	1,035

	Estimated subsidy claim for 1992-93	*Estimated subsidy claim per dwelling for 1992-93*
Lambeth	133,037,277	2,797
Islington	130,173,124	3,336
Manchester	129,492,486	1,414
Hackney	120,192,731	2,728
Southwark	110,043,144	1,954
Birmingham	107,543,367	996
Camden	103,147,677	3,124
Tower Hamlets	100,361,349	2,557
Sheffield	83,720,944	1,153
Liverpool	83,589,876	1,464

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state the difference between the standard spending assessments relating to capital charges allotted to local authorities and the amount which they needed to disburse on such expenditure for the year 1991-92, where that difference exceeded £1 million, together with the name of the local authority and the excess amount so paid.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* The capital financing element of the 1991-92 SSAs totalled £2,950·7 million. The latest information available to my Department indicates that local authorities have budgeted to spend £2,973·3 million on capital financing in 1991-92.

The table shows the capital financing SSA element, the equivalent budgeted net revenue expenditure on capital financing, and the difference between these two amounts in 1991-92 for those local authorities where the difference exceeds £1 million.

£ million

	Capital financing SSA	*Equivalent net revenue expenditure*	*Difference*
Bath	0·662	5·664	5·002
Bristol	3·245	9·069	5·824
North Bedfordshire	0·697	−0·507	−1·204
Bracknell Forest	0·455	−2·006	−2·461
Newbury	0·718	2·001	1·283
Slough	0·812	−1·928	−2·740
Windsor and Maidenhead	0·783	4·639	3·856
Milton Keynes	2·082	3·891	1·809
Wycombe	0·828	14·573	13·745
Huntingdonshire	0·641	5·317	4·676
Peterborough	1·041	2·224	1·183
Vale Royal	0·598	−1·047	−1·645
Warrington	1·200	2·860	1·660
Hartlepool	1·342	3·057	1·715
Langbaurgh-on-Tees	1·522	3·533	2·011
Middlesbrough	2·555	4·147	1·592
Stockton-on-Tees	1·392	2·505	1·113
Kerrier	0·665	1·896	1·231
Chesterfield	0·617	4·441	3·824
Derby	1·849	3·722	1·873
East Devon	0·688	−0·537	−1·225
Plymouth	2·206	3·869	1·663
Teignbridge	0·660	1·924	1·264
Bournemouth	1·578	10·155	8·577
Christchurch	0·456	−0·737	−1·193
West Dorset	0·886	−1·108	−1·994
Derwentside	0·702	1·937	1·235
Wear Valley	0·459	2·815	2·356
Brighton	1·375	3·838	2·463
Hastings	1·404	2·926	1·522
Basildon	1·007	6·971	5·964
Braintree	0·562	2·144	1·582
Brentwood	0·409	2·979	2·570
Chelmsford	0·894	3·911	3·017
Colchester	1·087	−0·192	−1·279

	Capital financing SSA	Equivalent net revenue expenditure	Difference
Epping Forest	0·829	2·021	1·192
Harlow	0·643	2·325	1·682
Southend-on-Sea	1·447	3·055	1·608
Thurrock	0·670	5·033	4·363
Stroud	0·505	4·225	3·720
Portsmouth	2·126	−9·601	−11·727
Southampton	1·814	5·477	3·663
Winchester	0·578	2·354	1·776
Hereford	0·276	1·436	1·160
St. Albans	0·714	−0·375	−1·089
Three Rivers	0·495	−0·643	−1·138
Watford	0·506	−1·854	−2·360
Welwyn Hatfield	0·799	3·196	2·397
Glanford	1·041	2·286	1·245
Great Grimsby	0·627	1·650	1·023
Kingston upon Hull	4·230	8·561	4·331
East Yorkshire	0·427	1·593	1·166
South Wight	0·767	−0·933	−1·700
Ashford	0·479	2·655	2·176
Canterbury	1·336	3·224	1·888
Maidstone	0·804	3·229	2·425
Rochester upon Medway	1·061	3·064	2·003
Sevenoaks	0·530	−0·716	−1·246
Swale	0·753	3·406	2·653
Tonbridge and Malling	0·595	3·554	2·959
Blackburn	2·396	3·458	1·062
Pendle	0·629	1·726	1·097
Preston	1·946	4·754	2·808
Charnwood	0·745	2·378	1·633
Leicester	4·281	9·229	4·948
Melton	0·182	1·635	1·453
East Lindsey	0·643	2·413	1·770
Breckland	0·534	1·671	1·137
Great Yarmouth	0·752	2·001	1·249
Norwich	1·055	3·273	2·218
South Norfolk	0·538	−0·629	−1·167
Daventry	0·207	2·369	2·162
South Northamptonshire	0·350	−1·349	−1·699
Alnwick	0·325	1·833	1·508
Wansbeck	0·597	2·523	1·926
Harrogate	0·802	3·215	2·413
York	0·606	4·053	3·447
Ashfield	0·576	2·577	2·001
Gedling	0·737	1·789	1·052
Mansfield	0·725	2·503	1·778
Newark and Sherwood	0·765	3·611	2·846
Oxford	0·923	3·613	2·690
South Oxfordshire	0·746	−0·804	−1·550
The Wrekin	0·930	2·595	1·665
Cannock Chase	0·530	1·894	1·364
Stafford	0·666	2·767	2·101
Stoke-on-Trent	2·166	11·217	9·051
Forest Heath	0·288	1·779	1·491
Ipswich	0·892	2·687	1·795
Mid Suffolk	0·590	1·731	1·141
St. Edmundsbury	0·430	−1·001	−1·431
Suffolk Coastal	1·093	−1·258	−2·351
Waveney	1·067	2·122	1·055
Elmbridge	0·581	3·551	2·970
Reigate and Banstead	0·714	−2·903	−3·617
Woking	1·025	10·740	9·715
Nuneaton and Bedworth	0·634	1·725	1·091
Adur	0·343	1·382	1·039
Crawley	0·471	−0·660	−1·131
Thamesdown	0·859	10·655	9·796
West Midlands Fire and Civil Defence Authority	2·676	4·171	1·495
London Fire and Civil Defence Authority	9·904	7·431	−2·473
Merseyside Police Authority	2·037	4·353	2·316
Northumbria Police Authority	1·719	4·071	2·352
West Midlands Police Authority	3·524	5·403	1·879
Bolton	16·615	13·095	−3·520
Bury	9·607	7·782	−1·825
Manchester	42·724	75·611	32·888
Oldham	19·536	17·586	−1·950

	Capital financing SSA	Equivalent net revenue expenditure	Difference
Stockport	16·008	17·973	1·965
Tameside	12·615	13·922	1·307
Trafford	15·349	14·342	−1·007
Knowsley	12·494	9·846	−2·648
St. Helens	17·123	15·208	−1·914
Sefton	18·438	16·502	−1·936
Wirral	22·341	26·153	3·812
Barnsley	12·735	17·167	4·433
Doncaster	15·466	11·728	−3·739
Rotherham	13·959	16·313	2·354
Sheffield	32·735	41·411	8·676
Gateshead	19·877	15·810	−4·066
Newcastle upon Tyne	25·938	32·542	6·605
North Tyneside	15·495	13·820	−1·675
South Tyneside	16·415	15·200	−1·215
Sunderland	25·182	21·689	−3·493
Birmingham	71·763	113·620	41·857
Coventry	21·379	40·177	18·798
Dudley	20·101	21·865	1·764
Sandwell	18·171	20·454	2·283
Solihull	9·610	6·973	−2·637
Walsall	18·409	25·934	7·524
Wolverhampton	19·009	22·525	3·515
Bradford	38·682	32·836	−5·846
Calderdale	10·910	11·958	1·049
Leeds	43·218	57·969	14·751
Wakefield	19·577	10·542	−9·035
City of London	7·830	34·187	26·357
Camden	16·359	27·100	10·741
Greenwich	15·130	12·613	−2·518
Hackney	20·546	25·132	4·587
Hammersmith and Fulham	15·629	19·803	4·174
Islington	16·970	29·109	12·139
Kensington and Chelsea	13·704	9·049	−4·655
Lambeth	22·365	27·102	4·736
Lewisham	18·535	9·645	−8·890
Southwark	19·799	13·142	−6·657
Tower Hamlets	21·624	14·954	−6·670
Westminster	20·610	7·252	−13·357
Barking and Dagenham	7·031	10·626	3·595
Barnet	13·980	7·549	−6·431
Bexley	15·095	12·508	−2·588
Brent	20·414	25·137	4·723
Bromley	16·370	24·579	8·209
Croydon	18·222	2·944	−15·278
Ealing	19·662	16·636	−3·027
Enfield	19·757	22·897	3·141
Haringey	18·095	29·877	11·782
Harrow	16·484	11·588	−4·896
Havering	12·520	8·121	−4·399
Hillingdon	19·779	14·824	−4·955
Hounslow	12·888	14·833	1·945
Kingston upon Thames	10·446	4·808	−5·638
Merton	12·619	15·451	2·833
Newham	23·586	26·883	3·297
Redbridge	13·107	8·551	−4·556
Richmond upon Thames	8·501	5·769	−2·732
Sutton	10·796	8·537	−2·258
Waltham Forest	17·567	13·658	−3·909
Avon	33·924	23·976	−9·948
Bedfordshire	21·280	26·002	4·722
Berkshire	34·934	42·389	7·455
Cambridgeshire	31·314	14·716	−16·598
Cheshire	41·132	42·558	1·426
Cleveland	29·774	34·493	4·719
Cornwall	26·796	17·680	−9·116
Cumbria	24·068	20·300	−3·768
Derbyshire	48·043	31·389	−16·654
Devon	44·846	34·906	−9·940
Dorset	27·321	3·291	−24·030
Durham	26·357	21·714	−4·643
East Sussex	35·141	28·812	−6·329
Essex	72·777	52·976	−19·801
Gloucestershire	25.277	19·714	−5·563

	Capital financing SSA	Equivalent net revenue expenditure	Difference
Hampshire	70·469	48·033	−22·436
Hereford and Worcester	26·628	18·375	−8·253
Hertfordshire	38·813	19·762	−19·051
Humberside	44·489	36·293	−8·196
Kent	80·388	37·764	−42·624
Lancashire	74·180	80·534	6·354
Leicestershire	44·072	32·800	−11·272
Lincolnshire	26·760	29·963	3·203
Norfolk	30·299	20·136	−10·163
Northamptonshire	31·375	23·460	−7·915
Northumberland	14·538	7·790	−6·748
North Yorkshire	31·015	20·297	−10·718
Nottinghamshire	38·133	46·284	8·151
Oxfordshire	18·875	16·056	−2·819
Shropshire	22·566	16·809	−5·757
Somerset	22·065	19·731	−2·334
Staffordshire	47·723	38·649	−9·074
Surrey	38·025	53·235	15·210
Warwickshire	16·392	14·551	−1·841
West Sussex	27·975	16·436	−11·539
Wiltshire	25·388	15·057	−10·331

NB—The expenditure figures for the metropolitan districts include expenditure by the metropolitan transport authorities and the metropolitan waste authorities. The expenditure figures for the London boroughs include expenditure on waste regulation and disposal.

Council House Sales

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the total capital receipts available to local authorities from the sale of council houses in the last 12 months; and what was the total for the immediately preceding 12-month period.

Sir George Young: Receipts from the sale of council dwellings constitute the large majority of housing capital receipts. Our current estimate of usable housing capital receipts available to authorities from sales and disposals in 1991-92 is about £450 million (projected from the half-year data available). The value of 1990-91 usable housing capital receipts, reported by authorities, is £625 million. In addition to spending from usable receipts, councils may also finance expenditure from new borrowing, authorised by credit approvals, and by contributions from revenue accounts, and many also have unspent usable receipts from previous years.

Service Pensioners

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether he gives guidance on local authorities' employment policies, to seek to prevent the councils as employers from discriminating against prospective employees on the ground that they are in receipt of a pension as a result of having served in the armed forces; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will introduce proposals for legislation making it illegal for local authorities to discriminate against job applicants because they are in receipt of a pension as a result of having served in the armed forces; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will list all those local authorities who have an official policy of discriminating against job applicants on the ground that they are in receipt of a pension from the armed forces.

Mr. Key: Local authorities are responsible for their own recruitment policies. Like other employers, they are free to employ whom they wish, subject to the provisions of general employment law.

My Department holds no records of local authorities which discriminate against job applicants receiving pensions from the armed forces. Any legislation on this issue would be a matter for the Department of Employment. There are no plans to introduce legislation or provide guidance in this area.

Section 7 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 requires that, subject to other employment law, all appointments to local authority posts are made on merit. Within the terms of the selection criteria applied by local authorities, a successful applicant must be capable of meeting the requirements of the post applied for.

Assured Tenancies

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the number of short assured tenancies for the year 1991.

Mr. Yeo: The numbers of assured shorthold tenancies can only be estimated from survey evidence. The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys 1990 private renters survey estimated that there was a total of 136,000 assured shorthold tenancies in mid-1990. This is the most recent figure available.

Empty Properties

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the number of empty properties in the private sector.

Mr. Yeo: Estimates of empty dwellings reported by English local authorities in their annual housing investment programme returns for April 1991 amounted to some 640,000 dwellings, or 4·2 per cent. of the private housing stock.

Large Markets

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to exclude large commercial markets from permitted development as defined in schedule 2, part 4 of the Town and Country Planning: General Development Order 1988, S.I. 1913.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend has no plans to make such an exclusion.

Lead Water Pipes

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will assist households on low incomes with the costs of replacing lead water supply pipes in dwellings.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales and I have today written to local authority associations, the water industry, and other organisations, seeking their views on proposals to extend minor works assistance, under the provisions of part VIII of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. We propose that local authorities be given wider scope in providing discretionary assistance to meet the cost of replacing lead water supply pipes to all owner occupiers or tenants on income-related benefits.

This will complement the action water companies are taking to reduce plumbosolvency in water supplies and replace their section of lead service pipes. Where lead levels in water nevertheless remain high because of lead plumbing in houses or flats, the local authority will be able to help all those least able to meet the costs of these works, especially families with young children. This is intended to encourage modernisation of homes and protect public health while at the same time targeting resources where they are most needed.

A copy of the consultation paper has been deposited in the Library.

African Elephant

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received in respect of proposals to move the African elephant from appendix I to the convention on international trade in endangered species to appendix II; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I have held a number of meetings with a wide variety of elephant interest groups and independent experts.

The Government have repeatedly stated their full and unflinching commitment to maintaining the current ban on trade in elephant products as long as it is necessary to ensure the survival and recovery of African elephant populations. Moreover, there is no question of our agreeing to any changes which would not meet the stringent conditions specified when the ban was agreed in 1989.

We are not convinced that the time is right for a resumption in the trade in elephant products. We therefore intend to press strongly at the forthcoming conference of the parties to CITES in Kyoto for the retention of African elephants in appendix I to the convention.

Pollution Victims

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will name the parties to whom his Department has sent, and with whom his Department has consulted on the OECD produced recommendations on compensation for victims of accidental pollution.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer of 14 February 1992]:* The OECD council has not yet adopted the draft recommendation on compensation of victims of accidental pollution. Officials from the Department of the Environment, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Health and Safety Executive have contributed to the OECD's work and in doing so have maintained contact with representatives of British and European insurers.

Property Services Agency

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are being taken to offer employees of the Property Services Agency in Northern Ireland redundancy in anticipation of the privatisation of the Property Services Agency; whether the Property Services Agency in Northern Ireland will remain a separate entity after privatisation: and what steps he is taking to enable employees to make a considered decision upon the option of redundancy prior to the availability of details of the privatisation proposals.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 18 February 1992]:* PSAs work in Northern Ireland is handled by the PSA building management (BM) business. Ministers will review BM's progress towards privatisation later this year. It is therefore premature to speculate on the form which privatisation might take, and whether Northern Ireland should remain a separate entity.

In order to reduce manpower levels and thereby enable the PSAs businesses to compete more effectively, a voluntary early retirement/severance (VER) scheme, open to all non-industrial staff was launched throughout PSAs in late 1990. The benefits paid to those accepted for VER are the same as those which would be provided on compulsory redundancy. Officers who are uncertain whether to apply can request an estimate of their financial entitlements before making up their minds. Decisions on whether to offer VER, are taken in the light of business operational needs.

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many meetings or other discussions his officials have had with local government officers in Warwickshire about the county's standard spending assessment in 1991 and 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Warwickshire have had the opportunity —in common with all other authorities—to make written representations on our settlement proposals and to request meetings with Ministers. Officials have not met officers from Warwickshire to discuss the authority's SSA although regular meetings are held with the local authority associations to discuss general SSA issues. Warwickshire did, however, meet me and officials in the context of community charge limitation for 1991-92 and my hon. Friends representing Warwickshire constituencies have frequently taken the opportunity to discuss the methodology underlying standard spending assessments with Ministers in this Department.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Disability

Mr. McMaster: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what percentage of the work force of the House are disabled.

Mr. Beith: The number of registered disabled persons employed by the Commission represents 0·6 per cent. of the total House of Commons staff. That figure does not include registered disabled persons employed by Members or organisations in the House for which the Commission does not at present have responsibility.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Clerk's and Library Departments

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission how many staff in the Clerk's Department and in the Library Department are at grade 5 or above.

Mr. Beith: The relevant figures are 34 and five respectively.

DEFENCE

Gibraltar

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance has been given to Gibraltar, in each of the last three years, to train workers made redundant by the run down of the dockyards; whether training and re-training places are open to all those previously employed in the dockyards, regardless of nationality; what representations he has received on these matters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Gibraltar dockyard ceased to operate under MOD management on 31 December 1984. With effect from 1 January 1985 the dockyard passed to the Government of Gibraltar and was operated on its behalf by Gibraltar Shiprepair Ltd. The provision of assistance and training for staff made redundant since the transfer is not, in consequence, a matter for the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the WE177s withdrawn from *(a)* Royal Navy and *(b)* RAF service will be dismantled or put into storage.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced in the House on 14 October, *Official Report*, column 58, that we would be making a substantial reduction in the numbers of free-fall WE177 bombs in the coming years and that in normal circumstances WE177s will not be deployed at sea. All WE177s withdrawn from service will be dismantled.

Scottish Battalions

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the permanent establishment of the battalion to be formed by the amalgamation of the 4 (Volunteer) Parachute battalion and the 15 (Volunteer) Parachute battalion; what will be the minimum size of each of the five detachments of the Scottish company within the amalgamated battalion; and what level of funding and logistical support will be provided to each of the five Scottish detachments.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The permanent establishment will be 490, conforming to the new standard being adopted by all 36 Territorial Army infantry battalions. Rifle companies of the new battalion will have the same formal establishment as those of the remainder of the Territorial Army infantry, increased by an allowance for recruits and where support elements of the battalion are allocated to the company. The Scottish Company of the new battalion will be able to overbear. The size of each detachment will reflect the ability of the company and its detachments to recruit and retain personnel.

In line with the remainder of the Territorial Army, the Scottish Company of 4 para will be properly supported and funded to carry out the roles requested of it. It is envisaged that detachments will be based on shared Territorial Army centres at their current locations, enabling them to draw upon shared facilities and administrative support.

HEALTH

Bed Availability

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he proposes to take on bed availability following the recent report by the Audit Commission.

Mr. Dorrell: We expect NHS managers to review local services in the light of the Audit Commission's report on the use of medical beds in acute hospitals and the further detailed work the Audit Commission will carry out in all health authorities and NHS trusts over the next 12 months.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to collect statistics on the occasions when no beds are available, other than through the accident and emergency units, in each hospital and district health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: There are no plans to do so. It would not be appropriate to collect this information centrally. We expect managers at local level to monitor bed use and availability.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he proposes to ensure fair and open competition in the NHS and the NHS trusts for potential female applicants for senior management posts; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The NHS is committed to equal opportunities in employment. The Department launched an initiative in June 1991 to put women's employment issues on the main NHS managerial agenda. In order to take full advantage of the potential of women in the NHS, the NHS management executive has signed up as a campaign member of Opportunity 2000. Among the

key goals set is the need to ensure that more women are appointed at the most senior levels as firm evidence of the commitment to making best use of all staff. Detailed guidance on how these goals may be achieved, and the results monitored, is to be issued in due course.

Toxocara Canis

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has carried out into which domestic and wild animals in the United Kingdom act as hosts for toxocara canis.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department has carried out no such research.

Lead Poisoning

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies his Department is conducting into the dangers of lead poisoning, especially for children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department is not at present carrying out any such studies. There has been very extensive research into the dangers of lead poisoning, with particular attention to neuropsychological effects in children. Studies of the latter, undertaken in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, were reviewed in 1988 by an advisory group of the Medical Research Council, the main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research in the United Kingdom. The advisory group concluded that

"any effects of lead at the exposure levels seen in the United Kingdom are very small and cannot be detected with any certainty . . . but the evidence for an association between body lead burden and IQ is now strong. In view of these conclusions it would be prudent to continue to reduce the environmental lead to which children are exposed."

Since 1974 it has been the policy of successive Governments to contain and reduce exposure to lead wherever practicable, particularly in those circumstances where people are most exposed. Successful measures have been taken to reduce lead exposure through petrol, water, air, food, industrial emissions, paint, cosmetics, ceramic glazes and toys, and monitoring programmes have shown a continuing fall in blood lead levels in children and adults.

Ozone Layer

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration he has given to Government action to protect British people from the likely effects of the depletion of the ozone layer over the Arctic and northern latitudes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) on 20 December 1991 at columns *353-54*. The Department proposes to seek advice from the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) on what further action may be appropriate.

Whitley Council Appeals Machinery

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement outlining the legal provisions relating to the abolition of the General Whitley Council appeals machinery as set out in section 32 of the General Whitley Council;

(2) if he will explain the reasons for the abolition of the General Whitley Council appeals machinery; and what consultations he has had with Whitley Council representatives before deciding to do so;

(3) if he will set out the machinery he proposes to put in place of the provisions now revoked as a result of his abolition of section 32 of the General Whitley Council.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The new conditions provide for employing authorities to introduce more straightforward local procedures after consultation with staff and local staff representatives.

Section 32 of the General Whitley Council provisions was seen increasingly as a cumbersome and ineffective way of handling differences of opinion between employing authorities and individual members of staff. Individual grievances which were not resolved at employing authority level were referred to a second level of appeal and, if again unresolved, to a third national level of appeal. There was no provision which required such appeals—which could be taken forward only by a professional organisation or trade union representing an aggrieved employee—to be finally resolved, and so many cases, some of which took a year or more to go through the system, were never resolved. This system did little to foster good industrial relations locally.

The management side of the General Whitley Council were in negotiations with the staff side for about four years to change the procedures until August 1991 when the talks broke down.

In the light of lack of progress the existing agreement was revoked and replaced by new conditions, using powers in paragraph 10 of schedule 5 of the National Health Services Act 1977 and regulations 3 and 4 of the National Health Service (Remuneration and Conditions of Service) Regulations 1991.

The new machinery is as follows:

Procedure for settling differences about conditions of service

1. The procedures set out below apply where an officer is aggrieved in relation to any matter affecting his conditions of service, but do not apply to settling differences relating to:—
   (a) dismissal or disciplinary matters,
   (b) disputes appropriate to resolution in accordance with section 33 of the General Whitley Council Handbook,
   (c) organisational change, or
   (d) matters for which it has been agreed that specific Whitley Council procedures will apply.
2. Subject to paragraph 1 above, an officer to whom this procedure applies may seek redress of his grievance in accordance with procedures determined by the employing authority. Those procedures shall be determined by the employing authority following consultation with staff and local staff representatives. The procedures shall be designed to provide for the speedy resolution of the grievance of an individual officer or servant as close as possible to its source. In establishing the procedures, regard should be had to good industrial relations practice such as that recommended by ACAS.
3. The procedures determined by employing authorities shall provide for the reference of grievances to a person or body other than the employing authority where the parties agree, in relation to a specific grievance, that the reference is appropriate.
4. Where the grievance relates to the application of a national agreement reached through the National Whitley Council, either party may seek clarification as to the intended interpretation of the agreement from the joint secretaries of the National Whitley Council if those secretaries agree to provide that clarification.

Marriages

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans to introduce legislation to require those responsible for conducting marriage ceremonies to require documentary evidence of the age, identity and marital status of those who are marrying; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government, in their White Paper "Registration: proposals for change"—Cm. 939—said that it will legislate to give to registrars and to the clergy of the Church of England and the Church in Wales powers to call for documentary evidence of the age, identity and marital status of those who are marrying. The legislation will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what restrictions exist on a registrar of civil marriages in England and Wales informing the appropriate authorities that an individual seeking to marry has overstayed his or her permitted visit to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dorrell: Superintendent registrars are statutory officers exercising functions under the Marriage and Registration Acts under the direction of the Registrar General. They are not agents of the immigration service and the fact that an individual has overstayed his or her permitted visit to the United Kingdom does not constitute a lawful impediment to that person marrying in this country. However, if a superintendent registrar has good reason to suspect that the proposed marriage of a person from abroad has been arranged for the sole purpose of evading statutory immigration controls he or she is instructed to report the facts to the Registrar General. If the Registrar General is satisfied that the marriage is purely one of convenience, then the facts will be passed on to the Home Office.

Children Act 1989

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has for monitoring implementation of the Children Act 1989.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have today issued a paper on the Department of Health's strategy for monitoring implementation of the Children Act. Copies of the paper have also been placed in the Library.

The monitoring strategy relies in the main on

—an enhanced collection of management information returns covering the key provisions of the Children Act.

—social services inspectorate's programme of a major survey of local authorities' progress towards implementation of the Act coupled with small scale inspections and development work.

research.

Information drawn from these sources will form the basis of my report to Parliament at the end of 1992 on the first year of the Children Act in operation.

Cervical Smears

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list each district health authority which are *(a)* reaching the one month target, *(b)* not reaching the one month target for cervical smear tests and *(c)* the number of weeks taken to process cervical smear tests in districts which are not meeting the target (i) currently, (ii) last year and (iii) five years ago.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 10 February 1992]:* As at December 1991, the latest available date, the following district health authorities were not reaching the one month target for cervical smear tests:

District	*Length of backlog weeks*
Bradford	5
Huntingdon	5
Parkside	5
Sheffield	5
South Bedfordshire	5
Northampton	7
Camberwell	11

Action is being taken by all the health authorities concerned to bring the remaining backlogs within the one month target.

All other district health authorities were reaching the one month target at December 1991.

In March 1991, the following district health authorities were not reaching the one month target for cervical smear tests:

District	*Length of backlog (weeks)*
Barnet	9
Basildon and Thurrock	6·5
Bath	12
Brighton	8
Bromley	8
Cambridge	7
Croydon	5
Enfield	12
Hampstead	6
Haringey	5
Huntingdon	5
Merton and Sutton	5
North East Essex	6·5
Nottingham	5
Parkside	9
Redbridge	12
Scunthorpe	7
Shropshire	23
South Derbyshire	5
Southend	12
South Tees	6·5
Stockport[1]	13
Sunderland	6
Tameside[1]	7
Tunbridge	6
Waltham Forest	5

[1] July 1991.

All other districts were reaching the one month target at March 1991.

Information on the processing of cervical smear tests is not available for five years ago. The one month target was introduced in 1988, following the setting up of the NHS cervical screening programme.

For information relating to July 1991 I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 16 July 1991 at column *145*.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

United Nations Trade Conference

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his Department was represented at the Eighth United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in Cartagena, Colombia.

Mr. Sainsbury: As Minister for Trade, I attended the opening ceremony on 8 February 1992 and made a statement on 10 February. Officials from my Department will be in attendance throughout the conference.

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visits)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether, on his visit to Hong Kong in September 1988, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. Maude), took part in party political activities in addition to official duties.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 13 February 1992]:* The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry arrived in Hong Kong in the morning of 27 September 1988 and left in the afternoon of 29 September. His programme included a breakfast with Conservatives Abroad.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether, on his visits to Hong Kong in *(a)* June 1988 and *(b)* April 1989, the then Secretary of State took part in party political activities in addition to official duties.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 13 February 1992]:* Lord Young arrived in Hong Kong in the afternoon of 19 June 1988 and left in the evening of 22 June. His programme included early evening drinks with Conservatives Abroad.

Lord Young returned to Hong Kong in the early evening of 16 April 1989 and left the same evening. This programme did not include any political engagements.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether, on his visit to Hong Kong in September 1990, the Minister for Trade took part in party political activities in addition to official duties.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 13 February 1992]:* The Minister for Trade arrived in Hong Kong in the afternoon of 22 September 1990 and he left in the afternoon of Wednesday 26 September. His programme did not include any political activities.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reduction he expects in production or employment in 1992-93 in those industries which are heavy users of energy as a result of the recent and proposed increases in electricity prices; and what steps he proposes to take to ensure that such developments are minimised.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 18 February 1992]:* The Government are aware of the concerns of large users about electricity prices, and have asked them for more detailed information. But they cannot predict the effects of changes in electricity prices on production or employment.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many applications have been made under section 57 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991 for the exercise of the powers conferred by schedule 5 to that Act; and how many authorisations have been granted;

(2) how many notices have been issued under paragraph 2 of schedule 5 to the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991 requiring *(a)* the attendance of persons or *(b)* the production of documents;

(3) how many applications have been made for the issue of warrants under paragraph 3 of schedule 5 to the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991.

Dr. Mawhinney: My right hon. Friend proposes to publish on an annual basis statistics relating to the use made of these provisions.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will list all the highways *(a)* closed or *(b)* diverted by orders made under section 25 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991 or the equivalent provision in earlier Acts giving in each case the date of the order.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information relating to the period prior to 16 May 1991 is not available in the format requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Since 16 May 1991, the closure of the following roads has been directed by order of the Secretary of State.

Under section 19A(1)(a) of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1987

1. The Movarran Road between Ordnance Survey grid references 18107304 and 18027285, in the townland of Movarran, County Fermanagh—directed by order dated 29 May 1991.
2. The border crossing point between Ordnance Survey grid references 15667188 and 15727180, in the townland of Rushindoo, to the north of Kesh, County Fermanagh—directed by order dated 5 June 1991.
3. The border crossing point between Ordnance Survey grid references 44002264 and 44142287, in the townland of Clonkee, to the south-east of Newtownbutler, County Fermanagh—directed by order dated 21 June 1991.

Under section 25 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991

1./2. The Killymeal Road, near its junction with Viewfort, Dungannon, County Tyrone and Orpheus Road, near its junction with Killymeal Road, Dungannon, County Tyrone—directed by order dated 24 September 1991.

3. The Antrim Road at Ordnance Survey grid reference 14858187, near Aldergrove International Airport, County Antrim—directed by order dated 29 September 1991.

The Secretary of State has not directed the diversion of any road in this period.

GP Fund Holding

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement detailing communications to general medical practitioners encouraging fund-holding practices outlining what incentives exist and

detailing the extent and timing of contact on the matter with health and social services boards with whom the general medical practitioners have their contracts.

Mr. Hanley: A detailed programme setting out how the GP fund-holding scheme will work in Northern Ireland and inviting expressions of interest was sent to all general practitioners on 16 December 1991. Expressions of interest will be accepted up to the beginning of March 1992 after which there will be a process of assessment in which health and social services boards will be closely involved.

Ballot Papers

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to monitor the number of persons refused a ballot paper at the forthcoming general election because they are not in possession of the correct identification document.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government have no plans to undertake such an exercise. The requirement for voters to produce a specified document at elections in Northern Ireland is well known and well advertised. Every elector in Northern Ireland either has or is in a position to obtain at least one suitable document free of charge.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Potato Marketing Board

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy regarding the future of the Potato Marketing Board and the potato marketing scheme.

Mr. Curry: The Government's policy is to encourage the Potato Marketing Board to respond to the needs of the market and to keep the potato marketing scheme under review in the light of developments in the European Community and elsewhere.

Common Agricultural Policy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will update his answer of 17 June 1991, *Official Report*, column *20*, giving revised figures for the common agricultural policy budget in 1991 and 1992, and forecasts for 1993; if he will state whether forecasts for 1993 incorporate changes in expenditure as a result of the current EC Commission proposals for CAP reforms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The table gives the information requested for the years up to 1992. A forecast for 1993 is not yet available as it would depend on decisions that have yet to be taken.

Year	*Guarantee section*[1]		*Guidance section*		*Other CAP expenditure*[2]		*Total expenditure on the CAP*	
	mecu	*£ million*	*mecu*	*£ million*	*mecu*	*£ million*	*mecu*	*£ million*
1985	19,728	11,601	690	406	52	31	20,470	12,037
1986	22,119	14,330	727	471	47	30	22,893	14,831
1987	22,950	16,508	863	621	32	23	23,845	17,152
1988	27,640	18,749	1,142	775	58	39	28,840	19,564
1989	25,849	16,925	1,349	883	49	32	27,247	17,840
1990	26,430	18,764	1,825	1,296	77	55	28,332	20,114
[3]1991	32,359	22,550	2,011	1,401	143	100	34,734	24,205
1992	36,849	25,679	2,644	1,843	364	254	39,857	27,775

[1] Figures for 1992 include 1,000 mecu (£697 million) for the monetary reserve.
[2] Other agricultural expenditure comprises mainly 50 per cent. of 5-year set-aside scheme, income aids (since 1990) and agricultural inspections.
[3] 1991 figures consist of provisional outturn (guarantee section and part of other CAP expenditure) and budget provisions (the rest).

Sources: 1985-1990: Budget outturn figures.
1991: Budget plus provisional outturn.
1992: Budget.

Hungarian Meat Fraud

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the problems encountered in the Hungarian meat fraud, referred to in his Ministry's expenditure plans 1992-93 to 1994-95.

Mr. Gummer: This matter is already under consideration by the courts and further investigations are continuing. In the circumstances, I am unable to comment.

WALES

Farm Incomes

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the net farm income figures for Wales for each year since 1985-86 to 1989-90, inclusive, for *(a)* upland farms and *(b)* lowland farms that are involved in cattle and sheep mixed farming; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Net farm income figures for lowland livestock farms have not been published separately since 1984-85. The extension of the less-favoured areas (LFAs) in that year led to a change in classification of a substantial number of lowland livestock farms to LFA livestock farms, and the resulting lowland livestock sample figures became statistically unreliable. Figures for hill and upland cattle and sheep farms for the period 1985-86 to 1989-90 are:

Net farm income

	£'000
1985-86	9·0
1986-87	9·3
1987-88	12·5
1988-89	16·4
1989-90	10·9

Usk Barrage

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding the *(a)* environmental, *(b)* agricultural and *(c)* groundwater impact of the proposed Usk barrage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have received a number of representations on the environmental impact of the proposed Usk barrage.

Chiropody Services

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement regarding the provision of chiropody services in Monmouth and in Gilwern, Gwent.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The provision of chiropody services is the responsibility of the health authority. There has been a temporary withdrawal of service at Gilwern due to accommodation problems, but the problem has now been resolved and the health authority will resume the service shortly. Meanwhile, chiropody services are available at Brynmawr and Abergavenny.

Metal Production

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of *(a)* United Kingdom iron, *(b)* crude steel and *(c)* tinplate is produced within Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: In 1991, 35 per cent. of United Kingdom iron production, 35 per cent. of United Kingdom crude steel production, and 100 per cent. of United Kingdom tinplate production took place within Wales.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much steel is made per head in Wales; and what were the equivalent figures for 1976, 1981 and 1986.

Mr. David Hunt: In 1981, 176 tonnes of raw steel were produced per steel worker in Wales. The equivalent figures for 1986 and 1991 were 239 tonnes and 341 tonnes respectively. No figures are available for 1976.

Fish Farm Appeals, Milford Haven

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he is now in a position to announce his decision on fish farm licence appeals in Milford Haven.

Mr. David Hunt: There is one appeal outstanding in this area. My officials wrote to the appellants over a year ago requesting information that is needed before I can determine the appeal. No information has yet been received, but my officials have recently written again, asking whether the appellants are able to provide the information or now wish to withdraw the appeal.

Electricity Supply

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of United Kingdom electricity is generated in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave him on 24 July 1991 at column *628*.

Grant Aid

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what assessment he has made of the extent to which grant in aid militates against the creation of a level playing field for commercial undertakings;

(2) how many commercial undertakings, and at what cost, have been grant-aided in each of the past 10 years;

(3) how many new jobs have been created in each of the past 10 years as a result of grant-aiding commercial undertakings;

(4) what assessment he has made of the effect upon the relative competitiveness of self-financing companies trading in the same sector as companies in receipt of grant aid.

Mr. David Hunt: Information in the form requested is not available within my Department.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the planned expansion of environmentally sensitive areas in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: On 20 November 1991, I announced that, following consultations with the Countryside Council for Wales, I had asked my officials to undertake a detailed analysis of four locations in Wales that I am considering designating as environmentally sensitive areas in 1992-93. The four locations are Anglesey, the Clwydian range, Preseli and Radnor. It is my intention to designate at least two of those locations as ESAs in 1992-93, but final decisions cannot be taken until the more detailed work has been completed. I will announce my final selection in due course.

Urban Aid

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table indicating for each of Delyn, Dinefwr, Dwyfor, Islwyn, Neath and Llanelli district authorities in Wales *(a)* their position on the 1991 revised index of the Welsh deprivation table, *(b)* the total urban aid granted to each of the authorities over the past three years and *(c)* the urban aid per capita this represents in each instance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 18 February 1992]:* The following table sets out details of urban programme allocations for each of the three years 1990-91 to 1992-93 for the district councils in Delyn, Dinefwr, Dwyfor, Islwyn, Neath and Llanelli. The total urban programme allocation per capita for each of the local authorities is also shown.

Urban programme allocations to local authorities in Wales are now being targeted at strategy-based projects and projects within the most deprived wards. Nevertheless, traditional factors, such as quality of bids submitted by local authorities and competition for finite resources, remain important elements in determining which projects are approved.

Local Authority	Position on deprivation table: revised index 1991	UP allocations (£) (including supplementary allocations) 1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	Total £	Population (thousands) (mid-1990 estimates)	UP per capita (£)
Delyn	18	621,713	699,141	312,258	1,633,112	66·8	24·45
Dinefwr	20	443,000	687,731	365,375	1,496,106	39·0	38·36
Dwyfor	15	65,000	—	150,000	215,000	27·1	7·93
Islwyn	17	1,004,350	1,070,884	1,456,686	3,531,920	68·6	51·49
Neath	14	516,324	823,520	554,317	1,894,161	64·9	29·19
Llanelli	16	495,254	442,327	489,327	1,426,908	75·6	18·87

Local Government Finance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average increase in community charge bills in 1992-93 compared with 1991-92 in Newport, West that is attributable to the change in community charge reduction scheme.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* For the three years of the scheme the figures are:

	1990-91 £	1991-92 £	1992-93 £
Alltyryn	0	0	0
Bettws	0	7	0
Caerleon	0	0	0
Coedkernew	0	15	0
Gaer	0	0	0
Graig	0	0	0
Malpas	0	15	0
Marshfield	0	0	0
Michaelstone y Fedw	0	0	0
Pillgwenlly	0	34	17
Rogerstone	0	0	0
Shaftesbury	0	0	0
Stow Hill	0	35	18
Tredegar Park	0	0	0
Wentloog	1	46	29

Cardiologists

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of cardiologists per million people in Wales at the last available date.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* At 30 September 1990; there were 4·6 (whole-time equivalent) consultants with a main specialty of cardiology in Wales, which equates to 1·6 per million population.

There were also six consultants with a main speciality of general medicine who were recorded as having an interest in cardiology; ie, undertaking at least one session per week in cardiology.

Health Authorities (NHS Expenditure)

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money was spent by the NHS Wales, per capita, in the area of *(a)* East Dyfed health authority and *(b)* Pembrokeshire health authority in 1991-92.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 18 February 1992]:* Information is not available on the geographical distribution of expenditure by the Dyfed family health services authority as between the areas served by the East Dyfed and Pembrokeshire health authorities. It is therefore not possible to provide figures on overall NHS expenditure per capita in East Dyfed and Pembrokeshire.

Indeed, some of the expenditure on hospital and community services within these districts will in fact relate to cross-boundary flows of patients from other parts of the country. Similarly, there are cross-boundary flows of patients from East Dyfed and Pembrokeshire to other districts, and that needs to be taken into account if valid comparisons of per capita expenditure are to be made as between the two authorities.

The following information therefore relates to the prospective per capita revenue expenditure on hospital and community health services by these authorities in 1991-92 on behalf of their resident populations, irrespective of where those services are provided.

	£
East Dyfed	428
Pembrokeshire	400

The figures are inclusive of capital charges based upon the recent revised estimates of their incidence across authorities. Capital expenditure is excluded, since that cannot be apportioned on a resident population basis.

As indicated in my right hon. Friend's announcement of allocations for 1992-93 on 4 February 1992, at column *125-28*, under the new resident population funding arrangements both authorities are set to benefit from higher than average rates of revenue growth over the next seven years as they progress towards their weighted capitation formula shares. Indeed, that process has already begun with the allocation of discretionary revenue cash increases of 7·6 per cent. and 8 per cent. respectively to the East Dyfed and Pembrokeshire health authorities in 1992-93.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money will be spent, per capita, by the NHS Wales in the area of Pembrokeshire health authority in 1992-93.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 18 February 1992]:* Information is not available on the anticipated geographical distribution of expenditure by Dyfed family health services authority in 1992-93, as between the areas served by the East Dyfed and Pembrokeshire health authorities. It is therefore not possible to provide figures on overall NHS expenditure per capita in East Dyfed and Pembrokeshire.

Indeed, some of the expenditure on hospital and community services within these districts will in fact relate to cross-boundary flows of patients from other parts of the country. Similarly there are cross-boundary flows of patients from East Dyfed and Pembrokeshire to other districts, and that needs to be taken into account if valid comparisons of per capita provision are to be made as between the two authorities.

On the basis of the allocations to district health authorities in 1992-93 that my right hon. Friend announced on 4 February at column *125-28*, the

anticipated revenue expenditure on hospital and community health services for the population resident within the boundaries of Pembrokeshire health authority in the next financial year—irrespective of where those services are provided—will be of the order of £422 per capita.

It should, however, be noted that that figure is based on the discretionary revenue funds already allocated to Pembrokeshire health authority together with an estimate of its prospective share of the additional revenue that will be made available to meet the capital financing needs of the Pembrokeshire health trust. It does not take into account expenditure on any centrally funded developments, details of which are still to be announced. Nor does it take account of the supplementary funding that is to be provided in respect of the recently announced pay increases for doctors, nurses and professions allied to medicine.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money will be spent, per capita, by the NHS Wales in the area of East Dyfed health authority in 1992-93.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 18 February 1992]:* Information is not available on the anticipated geographical distribution of expenditure by the Dyfed family health services authority in 1992-93 as between the areas served by the East Dyfed and Pembrokeshire health authorities. It is therefore not possible to provide figures on overall NHS expenditure per capita in East Dyfed and Pembrokeshire.

Indeed, some of the expenditure on hospital and community services within these districts will in fact relate to cross-boundary flows of patients from other parts of the county. Similarly there are cross-boundary flows of patients from East Dyfed and Pembrokeshire to other districts and that needs to be taken into account if valid comparisons of per capita provision are to be made as between the two authorities.

On the basis of the allocations to district health authorities in 1992-93 that my right hon. Friend announced on 4 February, at columns *125-28*, the anticipated revenue expenditure on hospital and community health services for the population resident within the boundaries of East Dyfed health authority in the next financial year—irrespective of where those services are provided—will be of the order of £449 per capita.

It should, however, be noted that that estimate is based on the discretionary revenue funds already allocated to the East Dyfed health authority. It does not take into account expenditure on any centrally funded developments, details of which are still to be announced. Nor does it take account of the supplementary funding that is to be provided in respect of the recently announced pay increases for doctors, nurses and professions allied to medicine.

Discretionary minor capital provision has been excluded because that has been allocated pro rata to the anticipated income (from all resources) of district managed units in Wales—ie, it has been allocated on a catchment rather than a resident population basis—and East Dyfed's share therefore takes account of cross-boundary flows from other authorities. Similar considerations will apply to major capital provision, details of which will be announced soon.

SCOTLAND

Disabled Workers

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what initiatives are in place within the Scottish Office to encourage the employment of people with disabilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The Scottish Office takes a wide range of initiatives to encourage the employment of people with disabilities, which include the following. Disablement resettlement officers receive prior notification of recruitment campaigns to help them encourage disabled people to apply. All advertisements and application forms indicate clearly that the Scottish Office is an equal opportunities employer, and also carry the Employment Department's disability symbol. Educational qualification requirements for entry to certain grades are relaxed for disabled people. On appointment staff with disabilities are assessed to establish what special assistance may be required.

The Scottish Office is fully committed to encouraging and supporting the employment of people with disabilities.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what funds have been spent on buildings in Scotland by Scottish Office Departments and the Scottish Courts Administration; and if he will give details of the expenditure on each building or work in each of the past five years.

Mr. Lang: Information in the form requested is not readily available.

Buildings-related expenditure borne on the Scottish Office Administration vote (class XV, vote 20) in each of the last five years is:

£ million

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92 Plans*
Capital	0·591	1·703	1·870	2·062	1·812	1·714
Running costs[1]	12·315	12·245	13·806	14·904	17·064	22·330
Total	12·906	13·948	15·676	16·966	18·876	24·044

Buildings-related expenditure incurred by the Scottish Courts Administration in each of the last five years is as follows:

£ million

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92 Plans*
Capital	4·774	4·825	9·489	15·390	18·645	22·035
Running costs[1]	6·293	7·141	8·803	10·133	14·220	14·527
Total	11·067	11·966	18·292	25·523	32·865	36·562

[1] 'Buildings-related running costs' includes, for example, rent and rates, minor repairs and maintenance and fuel and utilities.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of the work force of the Scottish health service were disabled in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The percentage of registered disabled people employed by the NHS in Scotland in each year since 1979 is set out below. Health boards and the Common Services Agency are expected, like other employers, to comply with the provisions of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Acts.

Percentage of Disabled Employees in the National Health Service in Scotland

Year	Percentage
1979	0·6
1980	0·5
1981	0·5
1982	0·5
1983	0·4
1984	0·4
1985	0·5
1986	0·4
1987	0·3
1988	0·3
1989	0·2
1990	0·2

Foresterhills Hospital Trust

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of capital allowed to be borrowed by the proposed Foresterhills hospital trust will be provided by way of public dividend capital.

Mr. Lang: Foresterhill trust has been allocated an external financing limit (EFL) of £105,000; this will enable the trust to invest £9·234 million in capital programmes.

The loan which relates to the EFL will be made available to the trust as interest bearing debt. However, in line with the majority of trusts in England the originating capital debt of Foresterhill will be divided 50:50 public dividend capital (PDC)/interest-bearing debt (IDB).

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefit System

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes have been made to the benefit system since 1979 to encourage those on benefit to enter education while still looking for work.

Miss Widdecombe: In 1979 the concession—known as the 21-hour rule—which enabled unemployed people under 21 years of age to receive supplementary benefit while studying part-time was extended to those over 21 who had been unemployed for a year or more. In 1982, the qualifying period of unemployment was reduced from 12 to three months and periods of participation in the youth training scheme became eligible to be counted towards entitlement to supplementary benefit under this rule. These changes were carried through to the income support scheme which replaced supplementary benefit in 1988.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* pensioner households, *(b)* families with children and *(c)* other households, who are tenants of (i) local authorities and new towns, (ii) housing associations and (iii) other landlords, are estimated to be receiving (1) maximum housing benefit with no deductions for non-dependants, (2) maximum housing benefit but with deductions for non-dependants and (3) a lesser amount of housing benefit towards their rent payments *(x)* currently and *(y)* since May 1989 in Great Britain as a whole and in each region for which figures are available; and what proportion of the total number of tenants in each category they represent.

Miss Widdecombe: The available estimates for May 1989 are set out in the table. I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) on 3 February at column 96 for the May 1990 estimates.

Housing benefit—Great Britain (Rent rebates and allowances)

	(i) LA tenants			(ii) & (iii) Private and Housing Association tenants		
	(a) Pensioner	*(b) Family*	*(c) Other*	*(a) Pensioner*	*(b) Family*	*(c) Other*
Premium:						
1. Maximum benefit	752,000	565,000	406,000	221,00	110,000	253,000
2. Maximum with Non-dependant deduction	104,000	31,000	67,000	15,000	5,000	8,000
3. Other Lesser amount	819,000	72,000	143,000	178,000	11,000	152,000

56 per cent. of local authority tenants receive Housing Benefit, of which 32 per cent. are pensioners, 13 per cent. are families and 12 per cent other.

42 per cent. of private and housing association tenants receive Housing Benefit, of which 18 per cent. are pensioners, 5 per cent. families and 18 per cent other.

Notes:

(i) Estimates of regional figures are unreliable.

(ii) May 1991 and current information is not available.

(iii) Rate rebate cases are excluded.

Source: Housing Benefit Management Information System.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether optional tenant improvements added to local authority or housing association rents in Scotland qualify for assessment in eligibility for housing benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: Housing benefit is intended to meet reasonable accommodation costs. Broadly this means rent and any compulsory service charges which are clearly related to the provision of adequate accommodation. A rent increase may be met by housing benefit if local authorities, which have statutory responsibility for administering the scheme, consider the increase is reasonable. In deciding whether a rent increase is reasonable, authorities are expected to have regard to the nature and extent of any improvements made to the dwelling.

Industrial Deafness

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to change the rule whereby claimants for industrial deafness benefit have to prove that over a 10-year-period they were employed in occupations involving continuous noise.

Mr. Scott: Advice to the Department on occupational deafness is provided by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council. The council has not recommended a change in the rule regarding 10 years' work in a prescribed occupation and we have no plans for such a change.

Actuarial Certificates

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each year since the regulation came into force the number of actuarial certificates issued detailing the transfer of assets from one pension fund to another.

Miss Widdecombe: Regulation 12 of the Occupational Pension Schemes (Preservation of Benefit) Regulations 1991 provides for an actuarial certificate to be given on the transfer of a group of members from one occupational pension scheme to another without their consent. This certificate is to the effect that the members concerned will be no worse off as a result of the transfer and does not detail the transfer of assets.

There is no requirement to notify the Department when such a certificate is given.

Local Offices

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what arrangements he has in place to relocate staff temporarily when the Paisley office is closed for development; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he expects works to start on the Paisley Piazza site; when he expects these works to be completed; and what arrangements he has in place to ensure the efficient operation of services at the Paisley office of his Department during the intervening period.

Miss Widdecombe: The operation of local Benefits Agency offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will publish a table showing the number of staff located at the Johnstone office in each year since 1980; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many staff from the Johnstone office *(a)* have been transferred to the Paisley office since 1989 and *(b)* will be transferred to the Paisley office this year; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The staffing of district offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if the Johnstone office of his Department is Crown property;

(2) if the Paisley office of his Department is Crown property.

Miss Widdecombe: The accommodation occupied by Benefits Agency offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is his strategy for the development of services provided from *(a)* the Paisley office and *(b)* the Johnstone office; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he has any plans to run down, close or recategorise the Johnstone office of his Department.

Miss Widdecombe: The planning of services offered by social security offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Disability

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the arrangements will be to notify people with terminal illnesses of the results of their applications for disability living allowance; whether this notification will indicate that the reason for qualification is linked to their terminal illness; if he will accept requests to notify carers rather than applicants; if he will publish the wording of notifications to both applicants and carers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: People awarded disability living allowance (DLA) on the ground that they are terminally ill will be sent notification of this decision. The award notice will tell the customer that they have been awarded the higher rate of DLA for help with personal care; it will make no mention of terminal illness. This notification will be accompanied by an information sheet explaining the criteria for awards of benefit at the available rates and rights of appeal where a person is unhappy with the decision on their claim.

Under special provisions, a third party may make a claim on behalf of a terminally ill person but the law still requires that the notification of the decision should be sent to the person on whose behalf the claim has been made, except where a third party has been appointed to act on behalf of a customer who is unable to handle their own affairs. Again, the notification to the customer makes no mention of terminal illness.

I will send the hon. Member a sample notification and information sheet shortly.

Centralisation

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what instructions he has issued to district managers of the Benefits Agency regarding the centralisation of services and the development of caller offices.

Miss Widdecombe: The provision of services in Benefits Agency district offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many social security claimants have been prosecuted and found guilty of claiming benefit while working and receiving wages in *(a)* Blyth Valley and *(b)* the north-east in the last two years.

Mr. Jack: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Expenditure

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much *(a)* disablement benefit, *(b)* death grant, *(c)* injury benefit and *(d)* family credit is spent per head of population in (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) Wales.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much sickness and invalidity benefit is paid out per head in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Wales.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not available.

Disability

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of his Department's work force have disabilities; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: As at 1 June 1991, 1·87 per cent. of the staff employed by the Department of Social Security and its executive agencies were registered as disabled. There is no information on staff with disabilities who choose not to register.

Tax Rates

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the top marginal tax rate possible *(a)* for a person in work paying income tax and *(b)* for a person at work on family credit and in receipt of housing benefit and community charge benefit.

Mr. Jack: The same tax regime is applicable to all those liable to pay income tax, irrespective of whether they are also eligible for benefits. For those receiving in-work income-related benefits, however, the highest likely marginal tax rate would be 25 per cent. The current top marginal tax rate for any payer is 40 per cent. compared with 83 per cent. in 1979.

North Yorkshire

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the expenditure and achievements of his Department in north Yorkshire during 1991; and what was the comparable position between June 1979 and May 1980.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* Pursuant to my reply of 11 February, the information on expenditure in north Yorkshire is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, since 1979 the Government have increased total spending on social security in Great Britain by 40 per cent. in real terms and has focused extra help on low income working families, less well off pensioners and disabled people. We have virtually eliminated the unemployment trap and we have got rid of the worst elements of the poverty trap. People in north Yorkshire will have benefited from all these improvements.

The creation of the benefits and contributions agencies in April 1991 has provided the opportunity for further improving efficiency and quality in the administration of social security business. In particular, the agencies have focused on improving service to the public and have issued their own customer charters. Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, and Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive of the Contributions Agency, will write to my hon. Friend about their agencies' achievements in north Yorkshire. Copies of the letters will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 20 February 1992

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Lenient Sentences

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Attorney-General how many referrals under the Criminal Justice Act 1988 have been made on the basis of alleged lenient sentences.

The Attorney-General: Since February 1989, when this part of the Criminal Justice Act came into force, I have sought the leave of the Court of Appeal to refer 69 cases, including five from Northern Ireland, in which the sentence passed appeared to me to be unduly lenient. Of these, in 36 cases the sentence was increased, seven cases were withdrawn by me, in a further 10 cases the sentence was not changed, in one case the sentence was lowered, and 15 cases remain outstanding.

Land Registry

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Attorney-General if he will publish the number of applications for registration of title for land currently being dealt with by the Swansea district land registry; and if he will separately distinguish the number of those applications that have already been at the district registry in Swansea for *(a)* up to three months, *(b)* between three and six months, *(c)* between six and nine months, *(d)* between nine months and one year, *(e)* between one year and 15 months and *(f)* over 15 months.

The Attorney-General: The Swansea district land registry processes more than 58,600 applications a quarter for registration of title and currently it is holding 47,879 applications of which more than 15,000 are awaiting the results of surveys or replies to correspondence raised by the registry with applicants.

The numbers within the categories of the question are as follows:

(a) Up to three months, 25,287.
(b) Between three and six months: 9,446
(c) Between six and nine months: 4,461.
(d) Between nine months and one year: 2,507.
(d) Between one year and 15 months: 1,638.
(f) Over 15 months: 4,540.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Attorney-General if he wil abolish the facility to pay an extra charge for faster registration of title to land at district land registry offices.

The Attorney-General: No. The facility referred to is a very long-standing element of the Land Registry's service to applicants. In the great majority of cases application for the registration of dealings in land are completed under the normal arrangements well before the applicant resells or otherwise deals with the land again. However, the special expedition service is needed to allow applications to be expedited in a relatively small number of cases of urgency, where the normal registration process might otherwise give rise to unacceptable delays in the conveyancing process. The fee for the special expedition service, currently a minimum of £35, is described by the Land Registration Fees Order 1991 and is required to offset the additional cost to the Land Registry of providing the service.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Environment Treaties

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those treaties to which the United Kingdom is a signatory which are concerned with protection of the environment giving, where appropriate, dates of signature, ratification, accession and entry into force.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office treaty index contains details of 12,000 treaties, agreements and protocols, many of which have environmental implications. The United Nations environment programme has 152 major treaties and other agreements recorded as being directly concerned with the environment.

Qaiser Khan

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 11 February, *Official Report*, column *446*, what further document was requested by the British high commission when Qaiser Khan was interviewed in Islamabad.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The further document requested by the British high commission at Islamabad when the family were interviewed on 22 February 1990 was the marriage certificate of the parents of Qaiser Khan. This is still awaited.

Mr. Salman Rushdie

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Iranian ambassador or a representative of the Iranian Government to discuss the case of Mr. Salman Rushdie.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have raised the plight of Mr. Rushdie with the Iranian Government on many occasions and will continue to do so. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs discussed the matter with the Iranian Foreign Minister when they met in the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in September 1991. More recently, my hon. and learned Friend, the Minister of State made clear our continued concern during a call made by the Iranian chargé, at his own request.

India

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government has made to the Government of India following the publication of the report by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs supporting India's right to retain nuclear weapons capability.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are unaware of the publication of any such report by the Indian Ministry of External

Affairs. However, the Indian Government are in no doubt about the importance we attach to nuclear non-proliferation. We take every opportunity to raise these issues with the Indians and encourage them to accede to the NPT, most recently when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs visited India in January.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 17 February, if he has raised the reports of breaches of the arms embargo in *(a)* Serbia and *(b)* Croatia with his European Community partners; and what action he is taking to ensure such breaches do not take place.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Reports of violations of the arms embargo are discussed in the United Nations. When possible, we have also raised the most disquieting reports bilaterally with the authorities of the country in which they are alleged to have occurred.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, upon what principles he will base his policy towards Bosnia-Herzegovina after its proposed referendum on 28 February.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The policy will be based on the guidelines adopted by EC Ministers on 16 December 1991 and the circumstances prevailing after the referendum. The guidelines require that the state to be recognised should respect the United Nations charter; guarantee the rights of minorities; respect the inviolability of frontiers except by peaceful agreement; accept commitments on disarmament, non-proliferation, security and regional stability; and promise to settle by agreement questions of state succession and regional disputes.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with his European Community partners about the implications for peace in Yugoslavia and in Europe generally of the decision to hold a referendum on independence by Bosnia-Herzegovina and on how this might affect the deployment of British personnel within a United Nations peace-keeping force.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We and our European partners are in regular contact about all aspects of Yugoslavia. These issues including the question of the referendum in Bosnia-Herzegovina were discussed most recently at a meeting of European Community Foreign Ministers on 17 February.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 17 February, who is currently responsible for the protection of Slovenian and Croatian citizens visiting or residing in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In the absence of diplomatic or consular representation, neither the Slovenian nor the Croatian Government have appointed any third government to protect their interests in the United Kingdom.

United Nations

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to publish in each week a record of decisions taken at the United Nations General Assembly and its constituent committees, together with an estimate of the cost to the United Kingdom of implementing such decisions that involve United Kingdom financial commitments.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and its constituent committees are published as United Nations documents. Copies are placed in the Library of the House as a matter of course. The budgetary implications of each UNGA resolution are also published in UN documents. We are arranging to have these too placed in the Library as a matter of course. The United Kingdom bears 5·02 per cent. of the costs of all activities financed from the regular UN budget.

TRANSPORT

Traffic Junctions (Pedestrians)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to make a statement on his Department's trials into new pedestrian facilties at traffic-signalled junctions including the use of infra-red devices to detect the presence and movement of pedestrians.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on Friday 14 February 1992, at column *672*.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he proposes to review the discount scheme for tolls on the Severn bridge.

Mr. Chope: Following the introduction of the tolling arrangements provided for in the Severn Bridges Act 1992, the discounts for advance payment of tolls will remain at the current rates of 20 per cent. for cars, motor caravans, light vans and minibuses, and 10 per cent. for buses and goods vehicles. The detailed administration of the discount scheme will be a matter for the concessionaire.

Road Planning

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those public local inquiries into trunk road schemes for which no ministerial decision has yet been announced, with the concluding date for each of those inquiries and, where appropriate, the date on which the inspector's report and recommendations were submitted to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Chope: The following schemes in the national roads programme for England are awaiting a decision following a public inquiry.

Scheme	Public inquiry finished	Inspectors report received
A4/A46 Batheaston/Swainswick bypass and A36 link	6 December 1990	28 June 1991
A6 Clapham bypass	4 October 1991	13 December 1991
A10 Wadesmill, High Cross and Colliers End bypass	11 November 1991	—
A11 Stump Cross to A505 junction improvement	14 November 1991 (joint public inquiry)	—
A11/A505 junction to Four Wentways improvement		
A13 West of Heathway to Wennington and Wennington to Mar Dyke improvement	8 February 1991	13 September 1991
A17 Leadenham bypass	20 December 1991	—
A19 Easingwold bypass	3 July 1991	2 September 1991
A27 Patching junction improvement	7 February 1992	—
A31 Ashley Heath grade separated junction	4 September 1991	21 October 1991
A31 Stoney Cross junction improvement	1 December 1989	23 March 1990
A43 Silverstone bypass	3 December 1991	—
A47 Walpole Highway and Tilney High End bypass	21 June 1991	23 July 1991
A52 Ashbourne relief road	27 January 1992	—
A63 Selby bypass	27 March 1991	1 October 1991
A65 Gargrave bypass	5 December 1991	15 January 1992
A249/M2 bobbing improvement	12 July 1991	30 October 1991
A435 Studley bypass	9 January 1992	—
M5 junction 18 Avonmouth relief road	3 October 1991	16 January 1992
M40 Waterstock—Wendlebury (Fencott bridge)	2 July 1991	15 August 1991
M56 widening junction 4 and 6	22 October 1991	21 November 1991
M66 Denton—Middleton	5 February 1992	—
M65 Blackburn southern bypass	27 November 1991	—

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he proposes to take in order to counter the increased level of carbon dioxide emissions from catalyst equipped motor vehicles.

Mr. Chope: Catalyst equipped vehicles are unlikely to be able to achieve the same levels of fuel economy and, hence, carbon dioxide emissions as the same vehicles without catalysts. The fitment of catalysts does, however, provide a reduction of approximately 90 per cent. in emissions of carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons and oxides of nitrogen.

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to reduce the level of carbon dioxide emissions from road transport.

Mr. Chope: The Government are committed to reducing carbon dioxide emissions from road transport as part of the target of stabilising these emissions at 1990 levels by 2005. We have been considering, with the motor industry, the various ways in which fuel efficiency, and hence carbon dioxide emissions, might be improved by better vehicle design for all types of vehicle. The Government are considering how best to provide the necessary stimulus to improve fuel efficiency, whether through fiscal measures or regulation. At the European level, the Government are pressing the European Commission to propose a directive to control carbon dioxide emissions from the whole European car fleet using a system of tradeable credits as an alternative to direct regulation. This system is designed to improve fuel efficiency and carbon dioxide reduction, whilst allowing manufacturers the maximum flexibility to choose the technology that will best suit their individual commercial constraints.

London Transport

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 12 February, *Official Report*, column *508*, if he will indicate the fees, benefits in kind and receipts other than salary paid to *(a)* the chairman and *(b)* board members of London Transport for (1) 1990-91 and (2) 1991-92.

Mr. Freeman: The total emoluments received in 1990-91 by the Chairman and Members of the Board, including salaries, fees, pensions and other benefits, are

shown in London Transport's annual report for that year. A copy of the report has been placed in the House Library. The corresponding figures for 1991-92 will appear in that year's annual report which will be published later this year.

Speed Limit Signs, Rutland

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport upon what date it was reported to his regional office in Nottingham that official 50 mph signs had been erected in the village of South Luffenham, Rutland; why they have since been removed; what has been the cost to public funds; and whether he will order a departmental inquiry into the procedures involved in erecting speed limits.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 18 February 1992]:* My Department was not aware that 50 mph speed limit signs had been erected and subsequently removed; nor is it aware of the costs incurred. The A6121, which runs through South Luffenham is a local road and, as such, is not the responsibility of my Department. The Secretary of State's involvement is confined to giving consent to any speed limit promoted by the local highway authority, Leicestershire county council. No consent has been granted in this case.

The system for implementing speed limits is clearly laid down and I do not consider that an inquiry into the procedures involved in erecting speed limit signs is necessary.

Ham Street Bypass

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish the results of the public inquiry into the proposed Ham Street bypass in the county of Kent.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 13 February 1992]:* The Secretary of State expects to publish the inspector's report of the public inquiries into the proposed Ham Street bypass by mid-March.

ENVIRONMENT

Standard Spending Assessments

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will revise the standard spending assessment formula in accordance with representations received from county councils;

(2) if he will re-examine his financial provision for Warwickshire in response to the county council's representations about its standard spending assessment.

Mr. Portillo: In each of the last two years changes to the SSA formulae have been made in response to representations from the local authority associations, including the Association of County Councils.

The calculation of standard spending assessments for 1992-93, as set out in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) (No. 2) Report (England), was approved by the House on 4 February. All representations from individual local authorities including those made by Warwickshire were carefully considered prior to this.

Leigh Barton

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column 226-27, about the historic monument Leigh Barton, near Kingsbridge in Devon; how many days Leigh Barton has been open to the public since English Heritage took over its guardianship in 1984; what is the admission charged to the public; how many members of the public have been admitted in each of the last three years; and what is the estimated cost of maintenance and repair to complete the project.

Mr. Yeo: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 11 February, *Official Report*, column *429*. Two supervised group visits, for which no charge was made, have taken place in the last three years; no requests for such visits have been refused. The cost of completing repairs at the property is estimated at £250,000.

Housing Revenue Account

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table describing the apportionment of housing revenue account subsidy between *(a)* rent rebate subsidy and *(b)* general housing subsidy on an outturn and estimated outturn basis for financial years 1990-91, 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1994-95, stating the assumptions employed to produce such figures; and if he will publish a table showing a similar apportionment, if the total cost of rent rebates was met by rent rebate subsidy.

Mr. Yeo: The information requested is shown in the table. The actual figures for 1993-94 and 1994-95 will depend on annual determinations of subsidy yet to be made. The table assumes that guideline rents and management and maintenance allowances for those years will be increased in line with inflation.

Apportionment of HRA subsidy between housing and rent rebates

£ million

	1990-91 outturn	*1991-92 estimated outturn*	*1992-93 forecast*	*1993-94 forecast*	*1994-95 forecast*
Housing element					
Positive entitlements	1,365	1,155	1,008	970	988
Negative entitlements	−915	−328	−530	−582	−620
Gross rebates	2,492	2,920	3,277	3,307	3,497
Total HRAS	3,662	3,747	3,755	3,695	3,865
Sum of positive housing element and gross rebates	3,857	4,075	4,285	4,277	4,485

	1990-91 outturn	1991-92 estimated outturn	1992-93 forecast	1993-94 forecast	1994-95 forecast
	per cent.	per cent.	per cent.		
Rent increase	10·0	8·0	9·5		
M and M increase	8·0	6·0	6·5		

Water Capital Projects, Cleveland

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost of capital renewal to the water supply and sewage currently under way in Cleveland.

Mr. Baldry: This is a matter for Northumbrian Water, but I understand that in the year to 31 March 1992 capital investment in the Teesside area, which includes Cleveland, is expected to total £18·2 million. A further £1 million is being spent on other sewerage schemes by third parties —for example, Teesside development corporation—under Northumbrian Water supervision.

Bird Pests

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the introduction of a general licensing system to control the shooting of bird pest species will be delayed until the European Parliamentary Environmental Group and the European Commission have decided whether or how the European birds directive is to be changed.

Mr. Baldry: Should such a system be introduced, it would take full account of any changes that may be made to the EC birds directive, and the need to maintain arrangements for sensible and practicable control of pest bird species where necessary.

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what work his Department is carrying out on preparing for the introduction of a closed season for bird pest species; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: There are no proposals for introducing a closed season for pest bird species.

City Challenge

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the general rules that should be adhered to by the bidders for city challenge; what is the procedure for awarding city challenge; and how much Government money is available for bids for this year's city challenge.

Mr. Key: The general rules and procedure relating to city challenge bids and information about available resources are contained in the documents "City Challenge Bidding Guidance 1993-94" and "City Challenge Financial Guidance Note No. 1" revision No. 2, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mortgage Repossessions

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on his discussions with mortgage lenders and insurance companies on mortgage repossessions; and when he intends to introduce a scheme.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced on 19 December that agreement had been reached with mortgage lenders on a package of measures. The package included pledges by lenders of £750 million for rescue schemes to help borrowers in difficulty, with the expectation that up to £1 billion would be available if necessary.

Lenders are now coming forward with details of schemes. Six lenders have so far announced schemes—Halifax building society, Nationwide building society, Leeds Permanent building society, Bradford and Bingley building society, National Westminster Home Loans and the Mortgage Corporation. Others are expected to follow soon. Lenders are also introducing improved counselling arrangements for borrowers and have given a commitment that no action will be taken to repossess properties while borrowers are making significant regular payments.

The Chancellor also announced that the Government would introduce legislation for the temporary suspension of stamp duty on transactions up to £250,000 and for the direct payment to lenders of sums allowed for mortgage interest in income support. Both these measures have now passed their Commons stages.

The combined effect of these measures is expected significantly to reduce the number of repossessions this year.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what effect Her Majesty's Government current policy on stabilising carbon dioxide emissions is forecast to have on the concentration levels of carbon dioxide in the atmoshere.

Mr. Baldry: The stabilisation of emissions of carbon dioxide, if applied globally, will slow the rate of increase of carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere. The impact of the United Kingdom acting alone would be negligible. We therefore strongly support concerted international action to control carbon dioxide emissions.

Holcombe Moor

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the results of his Department's inquiry concerning Holcombe moor; and if he will make a statement on the proposed future use of the land in question.

Sir George Young: The inspector's report of the inquiry was made available to interested parties on 16 July 1991, along with details of the new condition proposed by the Ministry of Defence for limiting its use of the land for training. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State hopes shortly to be able to say how he proposes to take matters forward.

Local Authority Debt

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the total level of local authority debt; from which sources the greatest proportions are borrowed; and what percentages mature in the short, medium and long term.

Mr. Key: Local authority loan debt, ie debt incurred for capital purposes, in England at 31 March 1990 is estimated at £49 billion. This figure includes both internal and external debt.

The chief sources of borrowing were the Public Works Loan Board—75 per cent.—and internal reserves and balances—20 per cent. Of the external debt, some 5 per cent was due to be repaid within one year, 20 per cent. in over one year but within five years, and 75 per cent. in over five years.

Building Maintenance, Camden

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he will take in response to the failure of the London borough of Camden to make the statutory rate of return on its building maintenance work in 1989-90.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend has given careful consideration to the response which the London borough of Camden has made to the notice served on the authority on 1 July 1991, and has today given a direction under section 19B of the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980 in respect of building maintenance work. The effect of this direction is to preclude the council from assigning housing repair and mintenance work in three of the five districts of the borough to its direct labour organisation without the express consent of the Secretary of State.

Royal Parks

Sir Philip Goodhart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the review of the royal parks.

Sir George Young: I am pleased to welcome today the publication of the report of the royal parks review group.

The review group's report is a key part of our strategy aimed at fundamental changes and improvements in the royal parks and how we run them. We are aiming for excellence in the way the parks are kept, quality in what the parks offer and better management and value for money.

We are grateful to Dame Jennifer Jenkins and her team for their efforts and their expertise. They have produced a stimulating report of interesting proposals.

The group's proposals will be discussed by local amenity groups, professionals and everyday park users at a conference on 5 March. We will produce a full response to the report once we have heard what they have to say.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Humming Birds

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee regarding the transportation of humming birds and other nectar-feeding birds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 12 November 1991]:* The Joint Nature Conservation Committee has not made any representations about the transportation of these birds. It has, however, advised that some of these species are difficult to keep in captivity. The committee is consulted about all individual applications to import these birds and and their sensitivity is taken into account in determining the applications.

Bird Pests

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department will be considering the national shooting and farming organisations before introducing a licensing system to control the shooting of bird pest species.

Mr. Baldry: Should any such licensing system be introduced, my right hon. Friend would be required to make an order to amend schedule 2 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Before making such an order, he would be required by the Act to give any local authority, or any other person affected, an opportunity to submit objections or representations.

EMPLOYMENT

Dignity at Work

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he intends to accept the recommendation of the European Commission on the protection of the dignity of women and men at work of 27 November 1991.

Mr. Jackson: By means of the Council declaration of 19 December 1991 the United Kindom Government endorse the general objective of the Commission recommendation.

Migrant Workers Convention

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what consideration Her Majesty's Government have given to acceding to the European convention on the legal status of migrant workers;

(2) what consideration Her Majesty's Government have given to acceding to the international convention on the protection of the rights of all migrant workers and their families.

Mr. Forth: We have considered both conventions carefully, but we are unable to sign either. The conventions go beyond this country's existing international commitments on access to labour markets and what is necessary to secure the interests of migrants working here, who already enjoy the protection of the same laws and regulations as British workers.

Population Statistics, Devon

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the areas and sub-areas which compose the travel to work area of Barnstaple/Ilfracombe and South Molton, together with the number of adults and of young people included in each of them.

Mr. Jackson: Barnstaple/Ilfracombe travel-to-work area—TTWA—consists of ward numbers 1 to 11 and 13 to 22 in North Devon local authority district—LAD. South Moulton TWA consists of ward numbers 24 to 29 in North Devon LAD, Taw Vale ward in Mid Devon LAD and Exmoor ward in West Somerset LAD.

The latest data on age distribution of residents for wards are available from the 1981 census of population and can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library. Similar data from the 1991 census of population should be available towards the latter half of 1992.

PRIME MINISTER

Hackney (Government Achievements)

Mr. Norris: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the achievements of Her Majesty's Government in Hackney since 1979.

The Prime Minister: The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) on 16 December at columns *22-25*.

European Assemblies

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a copy of the information bulletin on the activities of the United Kingdom delegation to the parliamentary assemblies of the Council of Europe and the assembly of the Western European Union, which has been sent to him.

The Prime Minister: I have done so today.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for 20 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Planning Seminars

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Prime Minister if he will give the date and location of his national seminar with planners, conservationists and farmers; if he will list the organisations, both government and non-government, which are to be invited to attend; if he will also give the same information for each of the local seminars being organised around the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* A national conference "The Countryside and the Rural Economy" is being held to promote the role of the planning system in balancing the needs to diversify the rural economy and to conserve and enhance the rural environment. It is being organised jointly by the Department of the Environment and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and will be held on 16 March at the Royal Agricultural Society of England.

More than 200 invitations have been sent to individual farmers and planners, representatives of conservation, farming, planning and other organisations with an interest in rural development, planning consultants and academics. DoE and MAFF propose to follow up this conference with a series of regional seminars, inviting people and organisations with a similar range of interests and concentrating on issues of particular concern in each area.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

European Community Grant Aid

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effect £15·2 million of grant aid to the successful applicants under European Community Regulation 866/90 will have upon the relative competitive position of companies whose projects will not be supported.

Mr. Curry: This is an EC-funded scheme and the question facing the Government was whether to allow some United Kingdom applicants to benefit or whether to allow all the money to be spent on helping their competitors in other member states. Given the impact of the internal market in 1993 the effect on unsuccessful companies of United Kingdom participation is likely to be

minimal, but the overall effect of United Kingdom participation on the competitiveness of the United Kingdom industry will be to show a significant benefit. All companies submitting projects are told clearly that they have no guarantee of success given the limited resources available.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total estimated expenditure of all applications under European Community Regulation 866/90 *(a)* received by the MAFF and *(b)* recommended by the MAFF to Brussels for the latest round of grant awards.

Mr. Curry: The total amount of grant aid sought in applications submitted to MAFF in respect of projects in England for the latest round of awards under EC regulation 866/90 was £27·3 million. Of these, projects seeking a total of £6·8 million in grant were recommended to the Commission.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many applications under European Community Regulation 866/90 were received by his Department; and how many were subsequently recommended to Brussels for the latest round of awards.

Mr. Curry: The total number of eligible applications for grant received by MAFF for projects in England for the latest round of awards under EC regulation 866/90 was 93. Of these, 20 were recommended to the EC Commission.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the extent to which FEOGA grants militate against the creation of a level playing field for fair trade in food within the EC.

Mr. Curry: European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund grants are paid in all EC countries, and are made according to clearly defined social and economic criteria.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what criteria were applied in assessing United Kingdom applications for grant aid in the latest round of awards under EC regulations 866/90.

Mr. Curry: In order to decide which projects to put forward to Brussels under this scheme we have to apply a range of criteria derived from the appropriate EC legislation, in particular EC regulation 866/90 and Commission decision 90/342/EEC. All projects must demonstrate direct benefits to primary producers and special priority is given to projects which improve marketing structures, assist the marketing of high value products, involve substantial technological innovation, reduce the seasonality of supply or cut the costs of prepared products, the recycling of waste or use of organic produce.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many applications were received in each of the Community countries for grant in the latest round of awards under EC regulations 866/90; how many were successful in each country and what was the value of awards in each member country.

Mr. Curry: The information we have through our involvement in the European Commission's management committee under which this grant scheme is administered is shown in the table.

Member state	*Successful projects*	*Total value of awards* *mecu*	*£ million approx.*
United Kingdom	53	21·7	15·1
Netherlands	54	6·5	4·5
Germany	124	11·4	7·9
Belgium	10	2·9	2·0
France	108	26·2	18·3
Denmark	15	5·1	3·6
Greece	15	13·9	9·7
Portugal	46	22·5	15·7
Spain	146	44·0	30·7
Ireland	35	31·1	21·7
Luxembourg	4	0·7	0·5

We have no information on the number of applications received in other member states. No programme for Italy has yet been agreed.

Grant Aid

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what basis it is decided to grant aid to industries which have structural problems due to over capacity.

Mr. Curry: Our overall approach has been to target sectors where there is a need for new investment. This would generally be as a result of market opportunities, but can also arise where there is a need for modernisation to improve the technical efficiency of the United Kingdom industry to enable it to compete with that in other member states.

European Community Intervention Stores

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the location of European Community intervention stores within the United Kingdom and in each case which products they contain.

Mr. Gummer: Since the question concerns matters which are the direct responsibility of the chief executive of the Intervention Board executive agency, I am asking him to write directly to the hon. Member.

Pennines Environmentally Sensitive Area

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the further changes he intends to make to the North Pennines environmentally sensitive area.

Mr. Gummer: In drawing up the Pennine Dales environmentally sensitive area scheme, which I announced on 15 January, I consulted farmers, conservationists and other bodies. I have continued to work closely with local interests, and as a result, I have concluded that further changes are needed. I will announce the details as soon as possible.

THE ARTS

Lending

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Minister for the Arts what was the total amount paid from public funds since 1980 to lenders of works of art and heritage objects to museums,

galleries, libraries and public exhibitions in respect of claims satisfied under the indemnification powers given in section 16 of the National Heritage Act 1980; and if he will list the amounts paid in each year since 1980.

Mr. Renton: Central records have been maintained only since 1985. The total amount paid under the Government indemnity scheme from then to the present time is £149,000. The amounts paid in each year are as follows:

	£
1985-86	0
1986-87	0
1987-88	78,000
1988-89	0
1989-90	10,000
1990-91	61,000

There have been no payments this financial year.

WALES

Sports Council for Wales

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current level of funding to the Sports Council for Wales; what proportion it represents of total Welsh Office expenditure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Grant-in-aid to the Sports Council for Wales for the current financial year is £5·2 million. This represents just under 0·1 per cent. of the forecast outturn—£5,286 million—for total Welsh Office expenditure as published in Cm. 1916.

Welsh Office support is also given to other bodies in respect of specific sports-related projects under the urban programme, rural initiative and PRNI—projects of regional and national importance—and SP—special projects—schemes.

Education (Abergavenny)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to develop Welsh medium education in Abergavenny; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This is a matter for Gwent county council as the responsible local education authority.

SSSIs

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many sites of special scientific interest are currently designated in Wales; what means exist to monitor loss and damage to sites of special scientific interest in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: A total of 827 sites of special scientific interest have so far been designated in Wales. The Countryside Council for Wales monitors these sites through its site integrity monitoring programme. This process involves undertaking a rolling programme of visits and collecting and examining relevant photographic evidence.

Leader Programme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to claw back financial assistance given under the European Community's Leader programme from the moneys allocated to the Development Board for Rural Wales and the Welsh Development Agency for the forthcoming financial year.

Mr. David Hunt: The likely level of EC receipts arising from the Leader initiative was taken into account in arriving at the grant in aid settlements for the respective agencies for 1992-93.

General Practitioners

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the average number of NHS general practitioner consultations in Wales per person, per year from 1977 to 1991 according to each age category.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information is readily available only for the years shown in the table.:

National Health Service general practitioner consultations per person per year by age group[1]

	0 to 15	*16 to 64*	*65 or over*	*all ages*
1978	7	4	6	5
1980	4	5	7	5
1982	4	4	11	5
1983	3	4	7	4
1985	5	4	7	5
1986	4	4	8	5
1987	7	4	6	4
1988	5	4	5	5
1989	6	6	7	7
1990	6	4	5	5

[1] Estimated from responses by households sampled in the General Household Survey.

Council Housing

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money his Department is making available to local housing authorities in Wales to deal specifically with problems of condensation and dampness in council housing stock; what is his assessment of the extent of the problem in Wales; and what are the prospects of achieving a solution.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 5 February. The results of the 1986 Welsh house condition survey indicated serious problems of dampness in 0·3 per cent. of the local authority stock.

Elderly People

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the projected number of single-person elderly households in Wales for each year from 1986 to 2001; and how many are estimated to be *(a)* male and *(b)* female.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The most recently published estimates of single person elderly households are those in table 3 of the "1989-Based Household Projections for Counties of Wales" a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Comparable figures for 1986 are not available.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* private, *(b)* voluntary, *(c)* local authority and *(d)* long-stay national health service places were made available for elderly people in Wales in each year from 1977 onwards.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The available information concerning beds and places is given in the following table:

	Type of premises				
	Private nursing homes[1]	*Local authority residential homes*[2]	*Private residential homes*[2]	*Voluntary residential homes*[2]	*National health service hospitals*[3]
1977	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	4,208
1978	N/a	7,424	1,571		4,263
1979	N/a	7,549	1,689		4,285
1980	N/a	7,581	1,969		4,383
1981	N/a	7,660	2,307		4,468
1982	984	7,732	2,584		4,489
1983	1,168	7,682	3,015		4,561
1984	1,333	7,758	3,894		4,656
1985	1,901	7,700	4,817		4,759
1986	2,787	7,844	5,875		4,707
1987	4,005	7,669	6,535		4,665
1988	N/a	7,559	7,492		N/a
1989	5,966	7,350	7,331	822	4,477
1990	7,759	7,119	7,760	859	5,389
1991	9,656	N/a	N/a	N/a	5,413

[1] Beds designated as elderly/long stay. Information is not available for the years 1977 to 1981. Data for 1982 to 1987 are at 31 December, for 1989 onwards they are at 31 March.
[2] Number of places at 31 March.
[3] Average daily available beds in the specialties of geriatric medicine and elderly mentally infirm/old age psychiatry, not all geriatric beds are designated as long stay. National health service beds are allocated according to the specialty of the consultant using the bed and not to the age group of the patient and, therefore, there will be beds in other specialties apart from the ones included here which at some time will be occupied by elderly patients. Data are for years ending 31 December for 1977 to 1987 and for years ending 31 March for 1989 to 1991. Due to a change in the definition of specialties, data for 1990 and 1991 are not strictly comparable with previous years.

In-patients

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will publish figures for in-patient bed days per 1,000 population in non-psychiatric hospitals in Wales in each year from 1979, broken down into age categories;

(2) how many in-patient admissions per 1,000 population into non-psychiatric hospitals have occurred in Wales in each year since 1979; and if he will publish the figures according to age category.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information is collected on the basis of in-patient discharges, including deaths, from hospital rather than admissions to NHS hospitals in Wales.

Bed days and in-patient deaths and discharges per 1,000 population in non-psychiatric NHS hospitals in Wales, by age of patient on discharge, are given in the tables.

Year	*0 to 14*	*15 to 24*	*25 to 44*	*45 to 64*	*65 to 74*	*75+*	*Total*[2]
In-patient bed days per 1,000 population[1]							
1979	378·3	360·8	473·3	1,088·2	2,684·3	7,243·6	1,193·7
1980	379·2	361·6	475·3	1,052·1	2,825·4	7,662·3	1,219·5
1981	392·6	366·8	471·4	1,051·6	2,673·5	7,372·6	1,199·1
1982	370·3	520·9	575·8	959·8	2,651·2	7,441·4	[3]1,236·1
1983	392·8	526·0	608·6	1,031·5	2,805·0	7,932·0	1,317·7
1984	392·5	529·9	595·9	1,033·1	2,866·4	7,707·6	1,316·7
1985	408·3	520·2	597·5	1,092·5	2,974·1	8,459·4	1,403·8
1986	399·1	506·2	576·2	1,033·4	2,860·1	8,048·3	1,352·3
1987	462·0	518·9	584·0	1,052·9	2,842·4	7,756·7	1,377·3
1988	445·0	514·4	550·7	1,009·9	2,769·4	7,412·4	1,327·2
1989	481·7	578·5	575·5	1,022·5	2,775·5	7,397·3	1,351·5
1990	418·9	467·6	506·3	914·8	2,424·5	6,629·0	[4]1,196·3
In-patient deaths and discharges per 1,000 population[1]							
1979	80·2	68·8	75·2	95·5	152·2	239·0	97·5
1980	83·5	70·8	78·8	100·7	162·0	255·3	102·0
1981	88·6	73·7	80·4	104·3	170·1	272·8	106·7
1982	84·2	109·7	103·2	95·5	158·7	261·5	[3]113·9
1983	95·6	120·3	119·2	113·5	189·2	303·2	131·7
1984	100·5	126·3	122·9	118·1	196·2	322·7	137·8
1985	102·2	131·7	130·3	124·2	215·4	375·4	143·4
1986	106·6	134·4	131·5	128·8	220·5	383·7	147·7
1987	106·9	135·8	128·8	129·4	218·2	372·7	151·7
1988	109·1	141·3	129·0	131·4	225·2	382·0	154·9
1989	110·3	142·5	127·0	128·6	228·3	394·5	155·3
1990	110·4	139·2	125·5	124·9	218·9	380·1	[4]151·8

[1] Figures prior to 1982 exclude Obstetrics and GP Maternity cases. Bed days by age of patient are not available for such cases in those years, but in-patient deaths and discharges per 1,000 population are given separately below.
[2] Includes age not known.
[3] Data for 1982 is believed to understate the true position due to an industrial dispute which affected the completeness of the data.
[4] Provisional.

Obstetrics and general practitioner maternity in-patient deaths and discharges per 1,000 population

Year	0 to 14	15 to 24	25 to 44	45 to 64	65 to 74	75+	Total[1]
1979	0·1	45·8	33·4	0·0	0·0	0·0	15·2
1980	0·1	46·0	33·7	0·0	0·0	0·0	15·5
1981	0·0	45·7	32·9	0·0	0·0	0·0	15·5

[1] Includes age not known.

Constituencies

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the six highest and the six lowest numbers of electors in parliamentary constituencies in Wales; and what is the average constituency electorate in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The six parliamentary constituencies with the highest number of electors and the six parliamentary constituencies with the lowest number of electors in Wales at 1991 are as follows. The average electorate of a parliamentary constituency in Wales was 58,086.

Parliamentary constituency	Electors
Highest	
Pembroke	73,500
Carmarthen	68,833
Clwyd North West	68,462
Delyn	66,953
Vale of Glamorgan	66,852
Ceredigion and Pembroke North	65,947
Lowest	
Meirionnydd Nant Conwy	32,754
Montgomery	41,334
Caernarfon	46,653
Cynon Valley	50,000
Newport East	50,931
Brecon and Radnor	51,738

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the acreage of each of the six geographically largest parliamentary constituencies in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The six geographically largest parliamentary constituencies in Wales are as follows:

Parliamentary constituency	Acreage (000s)
Brecon and Radnor	744
Ceredigion and Pembroke North	561
Carmarthen	525
Montgomery	510
Meirionnydd Nant Conwy	478
Clwyd South West	367

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

Homelessness

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give figures for the number of people accepted by local authorities in Wales as homeless under part III of the Housing Act 1985 between January and December 1991, by district, compared with the previous year.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is given in the table:

Number of persons in households accepted as homeless under part III of the Housing Act 1985, by district

	1990	1991
Aberconwy	137	104
Alyn and Deeside	474	499
Arfon	77	93
Blaenau Gwent	841	761
Brecknock	269	318
Cardiff[1]	2,483	—
Carmarthen	189	227
Ceredigion	331	373
Colwyn	103	178
Cynon Valley	623	1,017
Delyn	825	683
Dinefwr	181	410
Dwyfor	162	127
Glyndwr	46	87
Islwyn[1]	370	—
Llanelli	297	383
Lliw Valley	338	284
Meirionnydd	250	257
Merthyr Tydfil	496	365
Monmouth	281	388
Montgomeryshire	188	259
Neath	610	656
Newport	2,696	2,936
Ogwr	1,332	1,671
Port Talbot (Afan)	303	340
Preseli Pembrokeshire	209	255
Radnorshire	64	45
Rhondda	166	358
Rhuddlan	293	177
Rhymney Valley[1]	439	—
South Pembrokeshire	248	205
Swansea[2]	450	1,779
Taff-Ely	568	715
Torfaen	1,216	1,038
Vale of Glamorgan	1,160	1,184
Wrexham Maelor	863	730
Ynys Môn	97	111

Source: Welsh Office local authority returns.

[1] Information is not yet available for Cardiff, Islwyn and Rhymney Valley.

[2] It is known that the figure for 1990 for Swansea is under-recorded.

Kidney Patients

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients from within Gwent with kidney disorder are treated by dialysis at centres outside Gwent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not collected centrally. The hon. Gentleman may wish to approach Gwent district health authority about this.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to announce his decision on current planning applications for golf courses in the Wye valley area of outstanding natural beauty; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Planning applications for golf courses at Porthcasseg farm, St. Arvan's Chepstow and at

Croes Bleddyn farm, Itton, Chepstow were called in for my determination on 7 February. Following receipt of documents from Monmouth borough council, consideration is now being given to holding public local inquiries.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines are issued to local authority planning departments with regard to development in areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Planning guidance on development in areas of outstanding natural beauty may be found in the following planning policy guidance—PPG—and minerals planning guidance—MPG—notes issued jointly by the Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office:

PPG7 "The Countryside and Rural Economy" (paras: 3.8-3.11);
MPG1 "General Considerations and the Development Plan System" (para: 43);
MPG2 "Applications, Permissions and Conditions" (para: 39);
MPG3 "Opencast Coal Mining" (para: 14); and
MPG6 "Guidelines for Aggregates Provision in England and Wales" (para: 20).

Schools Inspectorate

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of all the visits made by Her Majesty's inspectors of education to schools in the Monmouth constituency since September 1990.

Sir Wyn Roberts: All secondary schools and over 70 per cent. of the primary schools in the Monmouth constituency have been visited by Her Majesty's inspectors of schools since September 1990. In secondary schools these visits have included surveys of mathematics, science and music; in primary schools they have included two full inspections and surveys of music, Welsh, history, geography, school-industry links and arrangements for teacher appraisal. The monitoring of the implementation of the national curriculum has received priority in the routine visits to schools.

Monmouth Borough Council

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what announcements he has made regarding the reduction in standard spending assessment for Monmouth borough council for 1992-93 since it was first announced; and what was the reason for the reduction.

Mr. David Hunt: The final local authority standard spending assessments were set out in the settlement reports laid before the House on 10 February and debated and approved by Parliament on 12 February. Recalculation of the provisional SSAs laid before the House on 20 January took account of the increase in resources for teachers' pay. To achieve consistency, it was also necessary to take account of other data changes. These altered the relativity of individual district authority SSAs within the overall amount of total standard spending allocated to district authorities which was unchanged.

Hydatid Disease

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research is available to him regarding *(a)* the incidence and *(b)* the effects of hydatid disease on animals and humans in Gwent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information on the incidence of human hydatid disease in Gwent for the period 1974 to 1983 is contained within the published report "The Changing Incidence of Human Hydatid Disease in England and Wales" by S. R. Palmer and Ann H. B. Biffen. The communicable disease surveillance centre (Wales) is currently working on an updated survey covering the period 1984 to 1990. This survey will again include data for Gwent. The results are expected later this year.

A considerable body of research exists into the effects of hydatid disease in humans, though none specific to Gwent.

As far as farm animals are concerned hydatidosis is not a notifiable disease, and there are no official statistics available on incidence. The disease causes little discomfort in farm animals affected.

Kidney Patients

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for a renal dialysis unit for Gwent health authority; and what is the estimated cost of such a unit.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This is a matter for Gwent district health authority. No proposals have been made by the authority to the Welsh Office.

National Health Service Staff

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what was the number of staff graded as general or senior managers in the health service in Wales on 1 January 1986; and what was the corresponding number on 1 September 1991;

(2) what was the number of administrative and clerical staff in the health service in Wales on 1 January 1986; and what is the corresponding figure for 1 September 1991.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 14 February 1992]:* On 31 January 1986 there were 6,805 whole-time equivalent administrative and clerical staff employed by the health service in Wales, including staff employed by district health authorities, by the Welsh Health Common Services Authority, and by certain family health services authorities which share the payroll system from which this information is derived, but excluding information for other FHSAs. The figure for 30 September 1991 was 8,733.

Of the September 1991 figure, 693 whole-time equivalents were graded as general or senior managers, including "second tranche" senior managers reporting to general managers or management board/teams. Due to changes in the grading structure of managerial staff between 1986 and 1989, a comparable figure for 1986 is not available.

Administrative and clerical staff costs as a proportion of the National Health Service pay bill in Wales have fallen from 12·2 per cent. in 1979 to 10·9 per cent. in 1991. Authorities often differ in their approach to coding jobs for record purposes. Advice is to be issued shortly to ensure that staff figures are derived on a common basis.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Income Tax

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish a table showing, by range of total income, for those *(a)* under and *(b)* over 65 years, the number of increases to the tax yield and estimated average rates of income tax payable in 1990-91, broken down by bands of £1,000s to £10,000, £2,000s to £20,000, £5,000s to £50,000 and £50,000s to £500,000, distinguishing between single persons, married and single persons qualifying for married allowance and other married persons.

Mr. Maude: The available information on average rates of tax is in the tables. Estimates of increases in tax yield could be made only by reference to an alternative tax regime.

Estimated average rates of tax paid by taxpaying individuals aged under 65, 1990-91

Gross income of individual	*Single people not claiming additional personal allowance*	*Husbands and single people claiming additional personal allowance*	*Wives*
£ p.a.	*per cent.*	*per cent.*	*per cent.*
Under 4,000	4	..	3
4,000 to 5,000	8	1	7
5,000 to 6,000	11	3	7
6,000 to 7,000	12	5	9
7,000 to 8,000	14	6	11
8,000 to 9,000	15	8	12
9,000 to 10,000	16	9	13
10,000 to 12,000	16	10	15
12,000 to 14,000	16	12	16
14,000 to 16,000	17	13	17
16,000 to 18,000	17	14	18
18,000 to 20,000	17	15	19
20,000 to 25,000	19	16	19
25,000 to 30,000	21	18	21
30,000 to 40,000	23	21	25
40,000 to 50,000	26	25	28
50,000 to 80,000	30	28	32
80,000 and over	34	34	36
All taxpayers	17	17	15

Estimated average rates of tax paid by individuals aged 65 and over, 1990-91

Gross income of individual	*Single people not claiming additional personal allowance*	*Husbands and single people claiming additional personal allowance*	*Wives*
£ p.a.	*per cent.*	*per cent.*	*per cent.*
Under 5,000	3	0	3
5,000 to 10,000	11	6	10
10,000 to 15,000	17	13	16
15,000 and over	26	23	23
All taxpayers	17	16	14

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the loss of revenue from taxation of investment income at *(a)* standard rate and *(b)* higher rates as a result of independent taxation of men and women; and how much of this loss results from the transfer of taxable assets for husbands to wives.

Mr. Maude: An estimate of the total direct revenue cost of independent taxation was given in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1988-89". The further analysis requested is not readily available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will bring up to date, for 1990-91, his answer of 19 October 1988, *Official Report*, columns *921-24*, concerning investment income, replacing the categories for married couples with and without earned income with *(a)* married and other persons qualifying for a married allowance and *(b)* married persons entitled only to a single allowance.

Mr. Maude: The updated information is as follows:

Number of individuals paying income tax and tax liability by range of total income 1990-91

Total income (lower limit)	*Singles not claiming additional personal allowance*		*Husbands and singles claiming additional personal allowance*		*Wives*	
	Number of individuals paying tax	*Tax yield*	*Number of individuals paying tax*	*Tax yield*	*Number of individuals paying tax*	*Tax yield*
£ pa	*Thousands*	*£ million*	*Thousands*	*£ million*	*Thousands*	*£ million*
Taxpayers under 65						
2,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
3,000	580	80	—	—	570	60
4,000	690	250	30	—	520	160
5,000	700	410	150	30	440	170
6,000	750	600	220	70	380	230
7,000	850	870	330	160	370	300
8,000	840	1,050	400	280	350	360
9,000	690	1,020	540	450	270	350
10,000	1,200	2,070	1,210	1,350	340	550
12,000	1,300	2,890	1,780	2,890	320	710
15,000	1,060	3,120	2,110	5,110	340	1,030
20,000	610	2,740	1,690	6,820	160	740
30,000	170	1,470	650	5,270	60	560
50,000	60	1,770	280	8,070	20	470

Total income (lower limit) £ pa	Singles not claiming additional personal allowance: Number of individuals paying tax Thousands	Singles not claiming additional personal allowance: Tax yield £ million	Husbands and singles claiming additional personal allowance: Number of individuals paying tax Thousands	Husbands and singles claiming additional personal allowance: Tax yield £ million	Wives: Number of individuals paying tax Thousands	Wives: Tax yield £ million
Taxpayers aged 65 and over						
2,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
3,000	70	[1]—	—	—	30	[1]—
4,000	210	40	—	—	80	10
5,000	170	70	20	[1]—	50	20
6,000	150	100	130	20	60	30
7,000	120	110	110	40	50	40
8,000	90	100	100	60	20	30
9,000	80	110	110	100	10	10
10,000	110	190	110	140	40	70
12,000	90	230	140	260	20	40
15,000	90	300	110	340	30	100
20,000	60	300	70	330	10	60
30,000	30	300	50	470	[1]—	20
50,000	10	390	20	440	[1]—	40

[1]— Less than £5 million or 5,000.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the level of income tax received on income from overseas for the last two years for which figures are available.

Mr. Maude: Income tax chargeable on investment income received by United Kingdom residents from overseas in the years ending 5 April 1990 and 5 April 1989 and taxed under cases IV and V of schedule D is estimated to be in the region of £170 million and £95 million respectively before allowing for double taxation relief. The amount of such relief allowed is not known.

Income tax deducted from foreign company and public revenue dividends paid by or through United Kingdom paying and collecting agents in these two years amounted to £201 million and £192 million respectively. Figures are also available for the year ending 5 April 1991 where the amount was £329 million.

Incomes

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his answer of 29 July 1988, *Official Report*, columns *724-25*, concerning the distribution of incomes by range of income in excess of £20,000 a year to give the figures for 1991-92.

Mr. Maude: Estimates for 1991-92 are given in the table. The figures relate to taxpaying individuals following the introduction of independent taxation in 1990.

Higher rate taxpayers 1991-92

Thousands

Total income (£)	Single	Husbands	Wives	Total
Under 20,000	0	0	0	0
20,000 to 25,000	0	0	0	0
25,000 to 30,000	60	40	20	120
30,000 to 50,000	240	750	70	1,060
Over 50,000	90	330	20	440
Total	390	1,120	110	1,620

Total tax liability of higher rate taxpayers

£ million

Total income (£)	Single	Husbands	Wives	Total
Under 20,000	0	0	0	0
20,000 to 25,000	0	0	0	0
25,000 to 30,000	390	250	120	760
30,000 to 50,000	2,060	6,170	620	8,850
Over 50,000	2,420	9,390	580	12,390
Total	4,870	15,800	1,330	22,000

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his answer of 6 April 1987, *Official Report*, columns *70-72*, showing the estimated amount of mortgage interest relief due to taxpayers with an income in excess of £20,000 a year, to give the figures for 1991-92; and if he will give separate particulars for those with income between £50,000 and £100,000 and in excess of £100,000.

Mr. Maude: Equivalent available information taking account of independent taxation is given in the table. The estimates are based on a projection from the 1989-90 survey of personal incomes and are therefore provisional.

Distribution by total income 1991-92 for higher rate taxpayers

Range of total income lower limit (£pa)	Single people: Number (000s)	Single people: Average amount of investment income[2]	Single people: Average amount of mortgage interest relief[2,3]	Married couples[1]: One taxpayer: Number (000s)	Married couples[1]: One taxpayer: Average amount of investment income[2]	Married couples[1]: One taxpayer: Average amount of mortgage interest relief[2,3]	Married couples[1]: Both taxpayers: Number (000s)	Married couples[1]: Both taxpayers: Average amount of investment income[2]	Married couples[1]: Both taxpayers: Average amount of mortgage interest relief[3]
20,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
25,000	60	5,500	730	10	1,300	750	—	—	—
30,000	180	5,300	700	250	2,700	670	90	3,100	700

Range of total income lower limit (£pa)	Single people: Number (000s)	Single people: Average amount of investment income[2]	Single people: Average amount of mortgage interest relief[2,3]	Married couples[1]: Number (000s)	Married couples[1]: One taxpayer: Average amount of investment income[2]	Married couples[1]: One taxpayer: Average amount of mortgage interest relief[2,3]	Married couples[1]: Both taxpayers: Number (000s)	Married couples[1]: Both taxpayers: Average amount of investment income[2]	Married couples[1]: Both taxpayers: Average amount of mortgage interest relief[3]
40,000	60	7,700	750	110	3,700	660	170	4,400	710
50,000	90	22,000	750	160	11,600	700	360	17,000	700

[1] With at least one partner liable at the higher rate. Married couples are analysed by joint income range.
[2] Average based on those having investment income or mortgage interest relief as appropriate.
[3] Average reduction in tax liability by virtue of the relief.

European Community Budget

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the net cost of contributions to the European Community, per head of population, in each country for each of the past five years.

Mr. Maude: The European Commission does not publish information on member states' net balances in respect of the European Community budget. The latest information available is contained in the European Court of Auditors' report for 1990; this gives information on member states' gross contributions and information on some 85 per cent. of receipts, with administration and research the main elements of internal expenditure excluded. Using this incomplete information, member states' net contributions per head for the last five years for which information is available were as follows. Net recipients are shown as negative.

ecu per head

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Belgium	+29	+73	+101	+113	+77
Denmark	−82	−58	−64	−34	−82
Germany	+61	+79	+99	+105	+88
Greece	−128	−154	−149	−202	−244
Spain	−2	−7	−23	−47	−44
France	+10	+11	+32	+52	+32
Ireland	−347	−311	−328	−381	−540
Italy	+3	−1	+19	+4	+7
Luxembourg	+160	+165	+180	+171	+157
Netherlands	−15	−36	−78	−76	−25
Portugal	−21	−38	−50	−63	−58
United Kingdom	+25	+46	+36	+59	+59

Note: Although the table shows Belgium, Luxembourg and Italy (except for 1987) as net contributors in each year, none is likely to have been when receipts excluded from the Court of Auditors' Report are taken into account.

European Community Contributions

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the net cost per head of population of the United Kingdom's contribution to the EC in the current financial year; and what is the projected figure for 1992-93.

Mr. Maude: The Chancellor's departmental report, Cm.1918, gives an estimated outturn for 1991-92 and forecast for 1992-93 of the United Kingdom's net contribution to the European Community budget, taking account of public sector receipts, but not those to the private sector, mainly for research. On the basis of these estimates the net cost per head of population for 1991-92 is £21 and the projection for 1992-93 is £50. The figure for 1991-92 is unusually low owing to a refund of contributions paid in earlier years and a high level of abatement.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the net cost per head of population of Germany's contribution to the EC in the current financial year; and what is the projected figure for 1992-93.

Mr. Maude: The European Commission does not publish information on member states' net balances in respect of the European Community budget. The latest information published in Germany's contributions and receipts is contained in the 1990 Court of Auditors' report. Information on 1991 will be given in the 1991 Court of Auditors' report, due to be published next December.

Public Works Loan Board

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if any changes are proposed in the quotas for lending to local authorities by the Public Works Loan Board.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Yes. The Public Works Loan Board Commissioners have issued a circular today giving local authorities advance notice of a change in the formula for calculating the quotas for 1992-93, reflecting continued concern about the level of investments held by some authorities expressed, among others, by the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee in its recent report "Banking Supervision and BCCI: the Role of Local Authorities and Money Brokers", HC26. The modified formula will reduce the quota available to local authorities who hold substantial investments which could be used in place of fresh borrowing. It will have little or no effect on authorities where investments are small. Quota loans are made at rates close to but below market rates: local authorities will still have access to non-quota loans.

The circular also notified local authorities of two improvements to the board's facilities: the ability to make premature repayments of loans in advance of the day on which it is due will be extended to include variable rate loans, and an option given to replace a fixed rate loan before maturity by a variable rate loan.

A copy of the circular has been placed in the House Library.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will give details of the quantity and content of representations he has received concerning the change to the postponed accounting system for VAT on goods and services commencing on 1 January 1993;

(2) how many individual businesses he expects to be included in the new postponed accounting system for VAT in each of the years 1993, 1994 and 1995;

(3) what assessment he has made of the effect on the cash flow of businesses of the postponed accounting system for VAT at the end of 1992.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 14 February 1992]:* No representations directly relating to the postponed accounting system have been received. Businesses have been informed of the change which has been generally welcomed because of the resulting cash flow benefits. Some representations have been received on the proposals that the larger businesses will be required to account for VAT monthly to offset the cash flow loss to the exchequer which is a consequence of the postponed accounting system.

Some 90,000 businesses will be included in the postponed accounting system and, because they will no longer need to pre-finance the payment of VAT on imports of goods and associated services from other EC countries, these businesses will make a cash flow saving equivalent to deferring payment for six weeks.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the items listed as zero-rated for VAT in table 4B.1 of annex B to chapter 4 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1991-92" are safeguarded until at least December 1996.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* Yes. In the context of European Community negotiations last year on VAT rates, our right to continue to apply all our existing zero rates was confirmed. The agreement reached relates to the so-called transitional period, which, in principle, will end on 31 December 1996 subject to unanimous agreement that the conditions for moving to the definitive system have been met, but is without prejudice to the future of our zero rates thereafter.

Overseas Income

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will bring up to date the information on gross overseas income for tax purposes given in his answer of 23 March 1987, *Official Report*, columns *42-43*.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* The latest estimate for property and entrepreneurial income from abroad, net of foreign taxes, relates to 1990 and is £81,287 million. Estimates for earlier years are given in table 10.1 of the 1991 edition of "United Kingdom National Accounts".

Income Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will bring up to date the information on investment incomes in his answer of 25 July 1986, *Official Report*, columns *671-72*, on the basis of income ranges adjusted to take account of inflation.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* Estimates are given in the table:

Taxpaying single people and married couples[1] with investment income in 1991-92

Total income lower limit £ per year	*Single people under 65*		*One taxpayer married couples under 65*		*Two taxpayer married couples under 65*	
	Number (000's)	*Average Investment Income £ per year*	*Number (000's)*	*Average Investment Income £ per year*	*Number (000's)*	*Average Investment Income £ per year*
3,000	1,700	560	90	640	—	—
7,000	2,100	640	440	780	—	—
10,000	2,500	870	1,500	890	230	1,300
15,000	1,200	1,100	1,300	970	640	1,100
20,000	750	1,600	1,100	1,200	1,400	1,400
30,000	160	3,600	280	1,900	660	2,200
40,000	120	13,000	260	7,700	660	9,700

Total income lower limit £ per year	*Single people 65 and over*		*One taxpayer married couples 65 and over*		*Two taxpayer married couples 65 and over*	
	Number (000's)	*Average Investment Income £ per year*	*Number (000's)*	*Average Investment Income £ per year*	*Number (000's)*	*Average Investment Income £ per year*
3,000	430	1,400	10	220	—	—
7,000	290	2,500	160	1,300	—	—
10,000	210	4,500	330	2,500	40	4,100
15,000	70	7,900	120	3,600	60	6,300
20,000	60	14,000	70	4,500	100	8,100
30,000	20	19,000	20	11,000	40	16,000
40,000	20	42,000	10	21,000	50	24,000

[1] Counting married couples as one and combining their incomes.

Investment Income

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether he will publish for each of the four fiscal years ended on 5 April 1991, the estimated amount of investment income accruing to *(a)* non-earning and *(b)* earning married women;

(2) if he will publish a table in the same form as in his answer of 7 November 1988, *Official Report*, columns *35-36*, showing for 1989-90 and 1990-91 the number of women and the amount of investment income divided between those with earned income and those without; and if he will add figures for a lower limit of £15,000, £25,000 and £100,000.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* Readily available estimates for taxpaying wives with investment income at 1990-91 levels of income are as follows.

Wives with Earned Income[1]

Range of Wife's Total Income (lower limit) (£ per year)	Number (000's)	Amount of investment income £ million
3,000	2,070	1,320
7,000	1,060	980
10,000	710	930
15,000	360	650
20,000	120	400
25,000	40	230
30,000	40	230
40,000	20	210
50,000	20	390

[1] Wives with income from employment, self-employment or occupational pensions.

There are estimated 80,000 non-earning taxpaying wives with total investment income of £760 million. It is not possible to provide an analysis of non-earning wives by income range.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish for 1990-91 and 1991-92 the information on investment income of females given in his answer of 6 April 1987, *Official Report*, columns *81-82*; and if he will publish separate figures for females aged over 60 years.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* Estimates for female taxpayers with investment income are given in the tables.

1990-91 levels of income
Single women

Total income lower limit £ per year	Gross investment Income greater than or equal to £1,000 per year: Number (000's)	Gross investment Income greater than or equal to £1,000 per year: Average investment income £ per year	Gross investment income less than £1,000 per year: Number (000's)	Gross investment income less than £1,000 per year: Average investment income £ per year
3,000	380	2,300	1,030	370
7,000	390	2,800	930	470
10,000	440	3,800	680	470
15,000	240	4,600	240	480
20,000	120	7,900	130	540
30,000	30	18,000	—	—
40,000	30	39,000	—	—

1990-91 levels of income
Married women

Total income lower limit £ per year	Gross investment Income greater than or equal to £1,000 per year: Number (000's)	Gross investment Income greater than or equal to £1,000 per year: Average investment income £ per year	Gross investment income less than £1,000 per year: Number (000's)	Gross investment income less than £1,000 per year: Average investment income £ per year
3,000	440	2,700	1,190	350
7,000	240	3,500	630	340
10,000	210	3,900	430	420
15,000	110	5,500	230	490
20,000	70	9,300	90	540
30,000	30	9,700	20	540
40,000	30	25,000	—	—

1991-92 Levels of income
Single women

Total income lower limit £ per year	Gross investment income greater than or equal to £1,000 per year: Number (000's)	Gross investment income greater than or equal to £1,000 per year: Average investment income £ per year	Gross investment income less than £1,000 per year: Number (000's)	Gross investment income less than £1,000 per year: Average investment income £ per year
3,000	310	2,300	900	340
7,000	350	2,700	950	420
10,000	380	3,800	740	420
15,000	200	3,900	310	450
20,000	150	7,200	180	480
30,000	30	14,000	20	370
40,000	30	35,000	—	—

Married women

Total income lower limit £ per year	Gross investment income greater than or equal to £1,000 per year: Number (000's)	Gross investment income greater than or equal to £1,000 per year: Average investment income £ per year	Gross investment income less than £1,000 per year: Number (000's)	Gross investment income less than £1,000 per year: Average investment income £ per year
3,000	330	2,800	1,060	310
7,000	180	3,400	650	320
10,000	170	4,100	510	390

Total income lower limit	Gross investment income greater than or equal to £1,000 per year		Gross investment income less than £1,000 per year	
	Number	Average investment income	Number	Average investment income
£ per year	(000's)	£ per year	(000's)	£ per year
15,000	90	5,600	270	440
20,000	70	8,200	130	500
30,000	30	9,800	20	540
40,000	30	21,000	—	—

I regret it is not possible to publish separate figures for females aged over 60.

Company Perks

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what effect the reduction in higher rates of tax has had on the giving of perks by companies; what is his estimate of the reduction in the value of such perks since 1979 as a proportion of the amount paid to those paying higher-rate tax; if he will estimate the taxable values in the current year of each class of benefit subject to taxation under special rules; and what estimate he has of the actual value of *(a)* the provision of accommodation and *(b)* cheap or interest free mortgages and loans for the purchase of accommodation.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* It is not possible to provide an estimate of the taxable benefits paid to higher rate taxpayers in 1978-79. The available analysis of estimates of the taxable value of benefits in kind and expenses payments in 1991-92 by type of benefit is as follows:

Type of benefit	Amount of taxable benefit (£ million)
Car	4,400
Fuel	550
Beneficial loan	180
Private medical insurance	420
Car allowance	190
General expenses	20
Travelling and subsistence	70
Entertainment	40
Home telephone	80
Living accommodation	110
Educational assistance	20
Goods or services supplied at less than market value	30
Vouchers	40
Transferred assets	110
Other expenses and benefits	1,100
TOTAL	7,360

It is not possible to give a reliable estimate of the actual value of provided accommodation or of cheap or interest-free loans for house purchase.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Seismic Monitoring

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether Her Majesty's Government support any broadband-3 component seismic data monitoring stations in the United Kingdom for scientific research purposes.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Her Majesty's Government support two broadband-3 component seismic data monitoring stations, and partially support another, in the United Kingdom. Data from these stations are available to the scientific community for research purposes.

Pupil Numbers

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the total spending on *(a)* primary—infant and junior—and *(b)* secondary schools in England each year since 1979 in cash terms and at 1979 prices; and what was the percentage change in the level of spending in real terms between each of those years.

Mr. Fallon *[pursuant to his reply, 12 February, 1992, c. 525-27]:* Following are revised tables showing corrected figures for spending on nursery and primary schools and secondary schools in England.

Nursery and primary schools[2]

Year	Net recurrent expenditure[1]	Net recurrent expenditure at 1979-80 prices[3]	Real terms change on previous year
	£ million	£ million	Percentage
1979-80	1,908·1	1,908·1	—
1980-81	2,328·2	1,967·5	3·1
1981-82	2,522·2	1,943·8	−1·2
1982-83	2,656·1	1,910·8	−1·7
1983-84	2,765·4	1,901·3	−0·5
1984-85	2,863·0	1,874·7	−1·4
1985-86	3,050·9	1,893·3	1·0
1986-87	3,401·1	2,043·4	7·9
1987-88	3,829·1	2,181·9	6·8
1988-89	4,225·4	2,246·4	3·0
1989-90	4,761·7	2,377·3	5·8

Secondary schools

Year	Net recurrent expenditure[1]	Net recurrent expenditure at 1979-80 prices[3]	Real terms change on previous year
	£ million	£ million	Percentage
1979-80	2,484·6	2,484·6	—
1980-81	3,093·4	2,614·1	5·2
1981-82	3,438·4	2,649·8	1·4
1982-83	3,691·5	2,655·7	0·2
1983-84	3,880·0	2,667·7	0·5
1984-85	4,017·3	2,630·5	−1·4
1985-86	4,352·3	2,700·9	2·7
1986-87	4,561·7	2,740·6	1·5
1987-88	4,906·7	2,795·9	2·0
1988-89	5,221·7	2,776·1	−0·7
1989-90	5,539·1	2,765·4	−0·4

[1] Net recurrent expenditure includes total expenditure other than costs of financing capital expenditure, less income other than from specific grants.

[2] Spending on nursery and primary schools was not collected separately for years after 1986-87, so expenditure figures cover both nursery and primary schools.

[3] Expenditure figures have been repriced to 1979-80 prices using the current GDP (Market Prices) Deflator index.

Note: The figures in the tables are derived from local education authorities' returns of their spending to the Department of the Environment.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

German Shipyards

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what efforts his Department has made to ensure that German shipyards do not have an unfair advantage over British shipyards in tendering for new contracts.

Mr. Leigh: Support for all Community shipbuilders is subject to the terms of the seventh directive on aid to shipbuilding. Under the terms of the directive the European Commission sets the maximum level of support which they may receive for each contract.

P and O Line

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance his Department gave to British shipyards to tender for the construction of a new cruise liner for the P and O line.

Mr. Leigh: No requests for assistance were received.

Auditing Practices Board

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions he has had with the Auditing Practices Board over its proposal to introduce a going concern audit test on companies.

Mr. Redwood: I met the chairman of the Auditing Practices Board recently to discuss its work programme, and he explained to me the board's current thinking on its proposals to revise the existing guidance on the auditor's considerations in respect of going concern.

Investors (Compensation)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about the exclusion of promises to pay binding in Scots law from the investors compensation scheme; and from whom.

Mr. Redwood: The rules and operation of the investors compensation scheme are a matter for the Securities and Investments Board.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what representations he has had about the protected withdrawal of insurance cover for the investors' compensation scheme; and whom those representations were from;

(2) what representations he has received about the funding of the investors compensation scheme; and from whom.

Mr. Redwood: The funding arrangements of the investors compensation scheme are a matter for the Securities and Investments Board.

Beer (Complaints)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many complaints he has received from members of the public in England concerning froth on beer.

Mr. Leigh: My Department has received 22 such complaints since the beginning of 1991.

Post Office (Customer Redress)

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the Post Office's arrangements for customer redress.

Mr. Lilley: As the citizens charter White Paper indicated, I asked the Post Office, in consultation with the Post Office Users' National Council—POUNC—to draw up a report on their present arrangements for customer redress. I have now received reports from the three Post Office businesses: Royal Mail, Royal Mail Parcelforce, and Post Office Counters Limited, together with responses from POUNC in respect of all three businesses. I will place both the reports and the responses in the Library of the House today.

One of the key principles of the citizens charter concerns redress for consumers when service falls below the standards they are entitled to expect. Of course, getting it right first time is much to be preferred to compensating for service failures. But when things go wrong, it is important that the customer can be assured, first, that Post Office practice matches up to the best in the field; and secondly, that the customer knows what he or she is entitled to.

On the first of these, the reports demonstrate the continued commitment each Post Office subsidiary is making, in consultation with POUNC, to ensure that they have the right compensation and redress practices for each business. While comparisons are not always straightforward, I am satisfied that Post Office arrangements are comparable to—and in several areas, surpass—those of similar companies or institutions.

The need for increases in amounts paid in compensation must be carefully evaluated, for it would be wrong for money to be diverted from service improvement into over-generous compensation for poor services. I do recognise, however, that there is some scope for increases where they help stimulate efficiency, and I welcome, therefore, the Post Office and POUNC agreement, for example, on increased payments for added-value letter service failure to up to twice the service fee or a book of 10 first class stamps, whichever is the greater.

On the question of ensuring a well-publicised and available complaints procedure, I note the commitment by all the businesses to increase the publicity given to compensation and redress schemes. Furthermore, I understand that it is the intention of the Post Office to set out compensation entitlements in the next edition of the "Post Guide", which is to be distributed to every home in the country during the course of this year.

I am grateful to the Post Office and POUNC for all the hard work and hard thought that has been put into these reports, and encourage both organisations to continue these productive discussions—which are entirely in keeping with the spirit of the citizens charter.

Bicycles

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will make a statement concerning the duty-free status of Chinese bicycles imported into the United Kingdom;

(2) if he will press the European Commission to change the import rules so that duty is applied retrospectively to all those imports of bicycles from China in excess of the approved import thresholds in 1991 and in 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 18 February 1992]:* Bicycles from China enter the United Kingdom under the European Community's generalised system of preferences —GSP—scheme which allows entry duty-free up to a threshold or ceiling of 9·45 mecu worth of bicycles. After this threshold is reached, duty may be reimposed by the Commission at the request of a member state if they are satisfied that domestic industry is being damaged by such imports. A review of the whole generalised system of preferences scheme is to be held this year. The views of the bicycle manufacturers, as of other sectors of industry, will be sought on changes which might be made to the operation of the scheme.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Terrorism

6. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 makes it possible to proscribe terrorist organisations such as the IRA. It also provides powers of examination, detention and exclusion, and also to counter financial assistance for terrorism. These powers are essential for the police to investigate and combat terrorism and form an essential part of the Government's counter-terrorist strategy.

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he received the report from the Viscount Colville of Culross QC on the operation in 1991 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have received such a report from Viscount Colville and have placed copies on the Library.

Policing Costs (Hunts)

10. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue guidelines to police forces about recovering costs of policing from fox and deer hunts along the same lines as costs recovered from football and other sporting activity.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Policing inside football grounds and at similar events is provided as a special police service, for which charges can be made under section 15 of the Police Act 1964. The guidance which has been issued on policing at football grounds includes general guidance on the principles of charging for special police services. The decision whether to provide a special police service is a matter for the chief constable concerned.

Prison Statistics

11. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were held in prison during 1991.

Mrs. Rumbold: The average population in prison establishments in England and Wales during 1991 was 44,808.

Carl Bridgewater

14. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received concerning the case of those convicted of the murder of Carl Bridgewater.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Since 1982, there have been some 200 representations about the safety of these convictions.

Strangeways Prison

15. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are now being held in police cells in Greater Manchester, Cheshire, Lancashire and elsewhere as a result of the riot at Strangeways: and what were the corresponding figures six months ago, nine months ago and one year ago.

Mrs Rumbold: There are currently 625 prisoners being held in police cells as a result of the loss of accommodation at Manchester prison. Six months ago this figure was 552, nine months ago 487 and a year ago 582.

Tobacco (Children)

16. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991 will come into force.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Act, apart from section 4, will come into force on 1 March in England and Wales, and Scotland. Section 4, which deals with the display of warning statements in retail premises and on cigarette vending machines, will be brought into effect later in the year after separate consultations with the interested parties have been completed.

Postal Voting

17. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will arrange for an immediate newspaper advertising campaign to outline provision for postal and proxy voting at parliamentary elections.

Mrs. Rumbold: As soon as the general election is announced, we shall run a newspaper and television advertising campaign, informing electors about their right to apply for an absent vote if they cannot get to the polling station to vote in person. We believe that such a campaign is likely to be most effective if launched once the date of the general election has been announced.

Police, Leicestershire

18. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will approve an increase in the number of police in the Leicestershire force.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend has approved 13 additional posts for Leicestershire from 1 October 1991 and a further 26 police posts with effect from 1 April 1992, subject to confirmation by the police authority that it will meet its share of the cost. These approvals will provide for a police establishment of 1,853; an increase of 148 or 8·7 per cent. since 1979.

Police, West Cumbria

19. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will visit west Cumbria to discuss matters relating to policing.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has no plans to do so at present.

Community Service

20. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of community service as a sentence.

Mr. John Patten: The introduction in 1989 of monitored national standards for the operation of community service orders has successfully promoted a higher use of the orders by the courts. In 1990—the first full year of operation and the most recent for which figures are available—the number of people who began a community service order was 37,490. This was 10 per cent. more than in 1989 and without any reduction in the proportion of offenders—36 per cent.—who had previously been in custody.

Probation Service

21. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the future of the probation and after-care service.

Mr. John Patten: The planned commencement from October of the main provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 will give the 55 probation services in England and Wales an even more important role, especially in preparing advice to the courts and in supervising offenders in the community.

Visas (Right of Entry)

22. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to resist proposals for visitors to other EC countries on visas to thereby have the right to enter the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: That is already my right hon. Friend's policy. The proposal for mutual recognition of visas which is contained in the draft external frontiers convention does not imply such a right.

Police, Cambridgeshire

23. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the increase in the police manpower levels in Cambridgeshire since 1979.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: At the end of November 1991 police strength in Cambridgeshire was 1,247; an increase since 1979 of 176 officers, or 16 per cent. My right hon. Friend approved 16 new posts from 1 October 1991, six more from 28 November and a further 10 posts from 1 April this year.

Violence Against Women

24. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department has taken to help protect women against violent crime.

Mr. John Patten: Government action in recent years has been directed towards tackling rape and domestic violence. In the light of Home Office research studies, which provided fresh insight into the nature of these crimes, we have taken a number of steps. We have issued guidance to the police on how to improve their response; we have strengthened the powers of the courts to punish offenders and to protect victims; and we have encouraged local agencies to work together to provide help and support to women who are victims of violent or sexual crimes.

Police (Urban Areas)

25. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the pressures on police in serving urban communities and the appropriate allocation of police manpower.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend considers requests from police authorities for increases in police establishments with the advice of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary. In formulating its advice, the inspectorate uses a manpower formula to aid assessment of the relative needs of forces, and one of the factors in that formula is the degree of urbanisation in each force area.

Lollipop People

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many lollipop people are known to be needed in Greater London; what is being done to recruit them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that at 11 February 1992 there were 208 vacancies on a total establishment of 1,350 schools crossing patrol posts. Recruitment effort is being directed to local communities by advertising in schools, libraries and community centres.

Betting Shops (Evening Opening)

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of representations he has received against the evening opening of betting shops has come from greyhound racing interests.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since issuing our consultation document on the evening opening hours of licensed betting offices on 14 October, the great majority of the representations we have received against evening opening have come from the greyhound racing industry and its supporters.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the increase in reported crime since 1979.

Mr. John Patten: The available information relates to recorded crime. Figures for 1979 to 1989 are published in table 2.2 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1989" and figures for 1990 are published in table 3 of Home Office Statistical Bulletin 13/91. Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

The British Crime Survey provides a measure of reported crime as experienced by adults in England and

Wales. The most recent available results show that there was a 30 per cent. increase in offences measured by the survey between 1981 and 1987, as against a 41 per cent. increase in comparable recorded offences.

Murderers on Parole

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of convicted murderers on parole from Leyhill open prison in February 1988, February 1989, February 1990 and February 1991.

Mrs. Rumbold: Information on the establishment from which ex-prisoners, still subject to a life licence, were originally released is not recorded centrally.

Northern Ireland Prisoners

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further progress has been made in relation to Northern Ireland prisoners who are serving sentences in gaols in England and Wales to serve the remaining part of their sentences in gaols in Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Rumbold: The policy and practice governing the transfer of prisoners between United Kingdom jurisdictions is being reviewed by an inter-departmental working party. We expect to receive the working party's report shortly.

Fire Service

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the total cost of the fire service in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* in the United Kingdom in 1979 and in the last year for which records are available;

(2) how many fire appliances were in service in *(a)* England and Wales fire brigades and *(b)* the United Kingdom fire brigades in 1979 and the most recent year for which figures are available;

(3) how many fire-fighting personnel were in post in fire brigades in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* the United Kingdom in 1979 and in the last year for which records are available.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested in relation to England and Wales is given in the table. Similar questions relating to the fire service in other parts of the United Kingdom are the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

	1979	*1991*
Total cost[1]	[2]355	[3]1,164
(£ million)[4]	825	1,164
Number of firefighters[5]	48,648	51,300
Number of fire appliances[6]	3,572	3,462

[1] Includes local authority current and capital expenditure.
[2] 1979-80 outturn.
[3] 1991-92 estimated outturn.
[4] Expressed in real terms at 1991-92 prices using GDP deflator.
[5] Wholetime and part-time (retained) firefighters and control room staff.
[6] Pumping and special appliances.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special service calls the fire brigades of *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* the United Kingdom responded to in 1979 and the most recent year for which records exist.

Mr. John Patten: Fire brigades attended 85,568 special service incidents during 1979 and 190,787 during 1990 in England and Wales. Figures for the United Kingdom are 90,508 and 198,868 respectively.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to how many call-outs to fires the fire services in England and Wales responded in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* the most recent year for which records exist.

Mr. John Patten: Fire brigades attended 304,582 fires during 1979 and 400,904 during 1990 in England and Wales.

Mr. Habib Somai

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make an early decision in the case of Mr. Habib Somai who first applied to remain as a spouse in this country on 22 January 1991, and whose Member of Parliament first wrote to him on 1 August 1991; and whether he will make a statement on the reasons for the time taken to deal with this application.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is about to write to the right hon. Member, conveying a decision on Mr. Somai's application. The delay in resolving this application is due, in part, to the need to obtain further information about Mr. Somai's original visa application in Tunis and to arrange an interview with Mr. Somai and his wife.

Constituencies

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the six largest geographical parliamentary constituencies in England and, in each case, show the acreage.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information is set out in the tables. The areas are given in hectares and include land and inland water. A hectare is equivalent to 2·471 acres.

Parliamentary Constituencies in England: The six largest constituencies, by geographical area

Constituency	*Area in hectares*
Penrith and the Border	327,964
Hexham	250,992
Richmond (Yorks)	233,012
Berwick-upon-Tweed	231,456
Skipton and Ripon	218,136
Torridge and West Devon	214,465

National Criminal Intelligence System

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who will have access to the new integrated national criminal intelligence system; how many records the system is expected to hold; and what will be the source of the information held on the system.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The current project plan only allows national criminal intelligence service staff to input information on to the computer system. However, it is

intended that police forces and regional crime squads will have terminals for inquiry purposes and that Her Majesty's Customs and Excise will be allowed restricted access.

Until the functional specification has been agreed, it is not possible to say how many records the system will hold. The intelligence will come from police forces in the United Kingdom, regional crime squads and regional drugs wings, Interpol, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and other international enforcement agencies.

HEALTH

Social Services

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he has any plans to compensate health authorities for any additional costs incurred by the failure of local authorities to meet their obligations to clients within the health authority boundaries;

(2) what steps he takes to monitor additional costs falling upon health authorities as a consequence of industrial action by social services or other staff caring for vulnerable people in their communities;

(3) what representations he has received from health authorities affected by the withdrawal of services by social services staff in Camden; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are not aware of any calculations of excess costs being made by health authorities in these circumstances.

The strike by social workers in Camden has disrupted social services in the borough, although statutory duties are being carried out on an emergency basis by management. The protracted nature of this dispute is clearly against the interests of the public and Camden residents. The dispute should be resolved quickly by the local authority and its work force.

Dentists, Durham

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients registered with dentists in the Durham area for each year since 1981 were *(a)* under 16 years, *(b)* between 16 and 65 years and *(c)* over 65 years.

Mr. Dorrell: Patients registered with dentists for the first time when the new dental contract was introduced in October 1990. The only figures available for a complete year are those for 1991. The information requested for the Durham family health services authority is as follows. All figures are for the year ending 31 December 1991.

	Number
Under 18 years	73,511
18 to 64 years	188,102
65 or more years	31,167

Source: Dental Practice Board GDS Quarterly Statistics.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists in Durham have resigned from the National Health Service.

Mr. Dorrell: None.

Toxocara Canis

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a table to show for each of the last three years his estimates of *(a)* the number of children in Great Britain who have been infected with toxocara canis, *(b)* how many of those infections are attributable to dogs, *(c)* how many are attributable to foxes and *(d)* how many are attributable to other canines; and what is his estimate of the level of infected (i) foxes and (ii) dogs in (1) urban and (2) rural areas.

Mr. Dorrell: Human Toxocariasis is caused by a variety of species in the genus toxocara. Information collected by the Public Health Laboratory Service communicable disease surveillance centre refers to infection caused by any of these parasites.

The table lists the total number of laboratory reports of infections due to Toxocara species in children for the period 1988-91. These data cover England, Wales Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Channel Islands and Isle of Man, but not Scotland.

No information is available on how many of these infections were attributable to dogs, foxes or other canines. The Public Health Laboratory Service is concerned predominantly with human infection and does not have information on the level of infection amongst urban and rural dogs and foxes.

Toxocariasis

Age Goup	*Laboratory reports by year*			
	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
1 year	—	—	—	—
1 to 4 years	15	8	12	11
5 to 9 years	9	5	8	6
10 to 14 years	5	3	2	1
TOTAL	29	16	22	18

Vapona Strips

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice has been issued by his Department concerning the adverse effects on some human beings of contact with Vapona strips or similar insecticides.

Mr. Dorrell: None.

All insecticides have to be approved for use under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986. Before approval is given advice must be sought from the statutory Advisory Committee on Pesticides.

Manufacturers are required under the regulations to state on the product what precautions should be taken by those who are likely to use or come into contact with it. Provided these precautions are taken, it would be most unlikely for any adverse effects to be experienced. We are not aware of any adverse effects being reported from the use of these particular products.

Electoral Register

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the will state *(a)* the estimated population of 18 years and over and *(b)* the number of names on the electoral register.

Mr. Dorrell: The latest estimate of the United Kingdom population aged 18 and over, relating to mid-1990, is 44·3 million. There were 43·6 million names on the 1991

electoral register—qualifying date 10 October 1990. Information about the 1992 electoral register is still being collected.

Prescription Charges

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the dates and amounts of increases in prescription charges, in pence and percentage terms, since June 1979.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The requested information is in the table. One hundred million more items are prescribed free now compared to 1979. One item in six now carries a charge. In 1979 it was one item in three.

Prescription Charges: increases in pence and percentage terms June 1979 to April 1992.

Date	Increase	
	Pence	Per cent.
16 July 1979	25	125·00
1 April 1980	25	55·55
1 December 1980	30	42·85
1 April 1982	30	30·00
1 April 1983	10	7·69
1 April 1984	20	14·28
1 April 1985	40	25·00
1 April 1986	20	10·00
1 April 1987	20	9·09
1 April 1988	20	8·33
1 April 1989	20	7·69
1 April 1990	25	8·92
1 April 1991	35	11·47
1 April 1992	35	10·29

Liverpool Family Service Unit

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from the Liverpool family service unit respecting funding; and what his response has been.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have received a letter from the chairman of the Liverpool family service unit about general funding for the unit. We have also received two applications from the Liverpool family service unit for funding specific projects and these are currently under consideration; it is not however our usual practice to fund local projects from the Department unless they are of national significance.

In responding to the letter from the chairman of the Liverpool family service unit I have pointed out that the overall standard spending assessment—the Government's view of the appropriate level of local authority expenditure—for children's services in 1991-92 showed an increase of 18·4 per cent. over 1990-91, partly in order to take account of the implementation of the Children Act. In 1992-93, the first full year of the Children Act, standard spending on children's services will be over 27 per cent. higher than in 1990-91, or up nearly 14 per cent. in real terms over the two year period.

It is for local authorities to decide how to encourage the provision of services by other, in particular voluntary, organisations within their own area. It is also for authorities to determined in the light of local circumstances the distribution of resources for services within their area.

Children Act 1989

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional financial assistance he plans to provide to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* voluntary organisations in order to enable them to carry out their duties under the provisions of the Children Act 1989; and if he intends to review the situation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have allowed for the full implementation of the Children Act in the local authority settlements for 1991-92 and 1992-93. Included in the latter is the introduction of a specific grant of £5·7 million to support expenditure of £8·1 million on the guardian ad litem and reporting officer service.

We discuss with the local authority associations new pressures on social services expenditure each year to inform the Government's decision on the settlement.

Voluntary organisations do not as such have duties under the Children Act except in relation to children looked after by them under section 61. This largely repeats their duties under section 64 of the Child Care Act 1980. Where voluntary organisations carry out duties on behalf of local authorities, such as under sections 17 and 47 of the Act, we would expect the authority to enter into a contract which sets out the financial basis upon which those duties are undertaken.

The Government also provide support to a wide range of voluntary organisations in the child care field under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968.

Radiation

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice his Department has issued to the public of the risk to health from the increased ultra-violet radiation resulting from ozone depletion.

Mr. Dorrell: The National Radiological Protection Board advises that its solar monitoring programme has not revealed any increase in ground levels of UV beyond the variations that would normally be expected.

With regard to exposure to UV generally, the Health Education Authority publications, "Are you dying to get a suntan?" and "Can you avoid cancer? A guide to reducing your risks", contain advice on the health risks from UV light. Copies are available in the Library.

The Department proposes to seek advice from the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment on what further action may be appropriate in the light of the studies referred to in the replies I gave the hon. Member on 20 December 1991 at columns *353-54*.

Patients' Fares

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether trust hospitals will operate the same system for the payment of fares for in-patients and out-patients as health authority hospitals.

Mr. Dorrell: All national health service units, whether trusts or directly managed, have a statutory obligation to reimburse fares for those in-patients and out-patients who satisfy the eligibility criteria.

Social Services Training

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what work has been done to evaluate the Department of Health's social services training support programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government fully recognise the vital importance of training social services staff to meet the challenges of implementing the Children Act, the recommendations of Sir William Utting's report "Children in the Public Care" and our community care changes. The social services training support specific grant will be £29 million in support of £41·4 million expenditure in 1992-93, an increase of nearly 100 per cent. in three years. The arrangements and allocations for local authorities were contained in local authority circular LAC(91)21, issued on 23 December 1991. The training support programme's scope and funding has increased year on year since its commencement in 1988-89, reflecting both its popularity and success in improving the quality and quantity of training for local authority staff. Staff from the voluntary and private sectors have also benefited. Three evaluation reports were published by the Department of Health social services inspectorate on 13 February 1992, on different aspects of the training support programme. Each provides good evidence of the success of the training support programme in increasing the availability of training for social services staff, and an indication of the benefits this brings for service provision.

Copies of the documents mentioned are available in the Library.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Legislation (Plain English)

Sir Robin Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he will set a timetable for privatising the drafting of Government Bills and statutory instruments with the remit *(a)* that the draft shall state on its face what it does, without reference save in appendices, to existing legislation, *(b)* that it shall wherever possible employ comprehensible English terminology and grammar, *(c)* that it shall avoid ambiguity and alternative possible constructions and *(d)* that such drafts of statutory instruments unamendable by Parliament shall undergo special scrutiny before being laid before Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: There are no plans to set such a timetable. Privatisation is not necessary to achieve the objectives detailed at *(b)* and *(c)* of my hon. Friend's question. As to *(a)*, reference to existing legislation is in some contexts unavoidable, and as to *(d)* I believe that the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments already performs an effective service for both Houses.

Parliamentary Questions

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Lord President of the Council when he will respond to the recommendation in paragraph 130 of the Select Committee on Procedure's third report of Session 1990-91 on parliamentary questions, concerning Government Departments' use of answers pursuant to previous answers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I am still considering the report and will reply in due course.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Family Credit

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many children are in families receiving family credit;

(2) how many families were receiving family credit at the latest available date; and if he will break these figures down into *(a)* one-parent and two-parent families and *(b)* one-earner and two earner families.

Mr. Jack: The latest available information upon which a breakdown on the basis requested can be provided is for the end of July 1991, when there were 754,000 children in the 355,000 families receiving family credit. The latter figure breaks down as follows:

	Number
(a) One parent families	133,000
Two parent families	222,000
(b) One earner families	338,000
Two earner families	17,000

Local Offices

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are his plans for the development of a new Paisley office; and when he expects works to commence and be completed.

Miss Widdecombe: The development of local Benefits Agency offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what new-build or capital works were undertaken in relation to the Johnstone office in each year since 1980; and what was the value of these works;

(2) if he will publish a table showing the amount spent on *(a)* furniture and fittings, *(b)* interior decorations, *(c)* carpeting and floor coverings and *(d)* works associated with office redesign at the Johnstone office in each year since 1980.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the table.

New build/Capital works

	Office redesign works	*Maintenance (external fabric improvements)*
	£	£
1985-86	nil	1,821
1986-87	nil	734
1987-88	nil	3,501
1988-89	[1]2,714	1,084
1989-90	[2]68,000	2,885
1990-91	[3]58,000	5,161

[1] Minor refurbishment
[2] Computer installation
[3] Combining public waiting areas

Figures prior to April 1988 do not include any work projects over £2,500, which were the responsibility of the Department of the Environment.

Other capital expenditure

	Furniture and fittings £	*Interior decoration* £	*Carpeting and floor coverings* £
1985-86	nil	nil	nil
1986-87	nil	nil	nil
1987-88	nil	nil	nil
1988-89	nil	9,200	nil
1989-90	26,451	1,000	21,500
1990-91	12,021	nil	nil

The information which I have provided does not include the years prior to 1985-86 as it is not readily available.

The amount spent on works associated with office redesign has been shown in the new-build/capital figures.

Expenditure

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the latest figures showing the spending per head on social security benefits in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Wales.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is not available in the form requested. Benefit expenditure in Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Regional breakdowns of current levels of benefit expenditure are not available.

Estimated average spending on social security per head of the population in Great Britain in 1991-92 is about £1,225.

Disposable Income

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has on the disposable income available on a wage of £150 per week to *(a)* a lone parent with two children and *(b)* a four-person family.

Mr. Jack: The information is given in the tables. All assumptions are set out in the published tax benefit model tables. Each family is assumed to live in council property appropriate to its size and to pay estimated average rent and community charge.

It should be noted that the results in the tables remain arbitrary. They cannot reflect, except by chance, the actual circumstances of particular people, and cannot claim to be representative of the population at large. The tables use hypothetical rents, so they do not reflect the full range of housing costs which people can pay. My hon. Friend may further wish to note that the tax/benefit model tables show the total net income on income support for each family type and this information has been included in the tables.

Single parent with two children aged four and six

Gross earnings (£pw)	*Take home pay* (£pw)	*Family credit* (£pw)	*Child benefit* (£pw)	*Total net income* (£pw)	*Net income after rent and community charge* (£pw)
150·00	126·75	12·55	22·35	161·65	130·92

Total Net income on income support = £115·06
Net income after rent and community charge on income support = £84·33

Married couple with two children aged four and six

Gross earnings (£pw)	*Take home pay* (£pw)	*Family credit* (£pw)	*Child benefit* (£pw)	*Total net income* (£pw)	*Net income after rent and community charge* (£pw)
150·00	126·75	12·55	16·75	156·38	120·95

Total net income on income support = £136·97
Net income after rent and community charge on income support = £101·54

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in the month of January on Merseyside how many people in receipt of income support or housing benefit were registered as in receipt of old age pension, disabled and having children under five years; and how many of those so registered received cold weather payments.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Industrial Asthma

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will issue guidelines with a view to assisting compensation claims in respect of industrial asthma being more quickly settled.

Mr. Scott: We are not aware of undue delay in deciding industrial injuries benefit claims for occupational asthma.

Residential Care Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state for each year since 1979 the total amount paid in supplementary benefit or income support towards *(a)* private residential care home fees, *(b)* private nursing home fees and *(c)* voluntary care home fees including estimated expenditure for the current financial year; and if he will express each element as a percentage of total expenditure for each year.

Miss Widdecombe: The available information is shown in the table:

Year	*Residential care homes* £ million	*Nursing homes* £ million	*Annual equivalent expenditure* £ million
December 1979	—	—	10
December 1980	—	—	18
December 1981	—	—	23
December 1982	—	—	39
December 1983	—	—	104

Year	Residential care homes £ million	Nursing homes £ million	Annual equivalent expenditure £ million
December 1984	—	—	200
December 1985	—	—	348
February 1986	—	—	459
May 1987	—	—	671
May 1988	—	—	878
May 1989	659 (60 per cent.)	446 (40 per cent.)	1,105
May 1990	741 (58 per cent.)	529 (42 per cent.)	1,270
May 1991	888 (47 per cent.)	984 (53 per cent.)	1,872
[1]1991-92	930 (48 per cent.)	1,020 (52 per cent.)	1,950

[1] Figures for 1991-92 are the estimated outturn of total income support expenditure on homes for the year.

Notes:

1. Figures for December 1979 to December 1984 are taken from the annual statistical inquiry; figures for December 1985 to May 1991 are taken from the quarterly statistical inquiry and are based on "snapshot" data.
2. Separate data are not readily available for residential care homes and nursing homes before May 1989 and to obtain it would involve disproportionate cost.
3. Separate data are not collected for voluntary homes.

Child Benefit

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would have been the value in 1992 prices of child benefit had it, since its inception, been increased annually by the equivalent of the rise in the value of *(a)* the retail price index and *(b)* average earnings.

Mr. Jack: The full child benefit scheme started in April 1979 when the rate of benefit was £4 a week. Using the movements in the relevant indices between the April 1979 and October 1991 uprating dates the values would have been *(a)* £9·95 and *(b)* £12·94. Comparable information is not yet available for April 1992, when we are again increasing both levels of child benefit.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to publish the Government's response to the fourth report of the Social Security Committee, Session 1990-91, and to the first report of the Health Committee, Session 1991-92.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government's response was published today and copies have been placed in the Library.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on how many occasions he has used his discretionary power to ensure that beneficiaries of pension schemes wound up because of insolvency have been guaranteed the guaranteed minimum pension.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 February 1992]:* The numbers of occupational pension schemes which wound up, for whatever reason, with insufficient funds to make the necessary payments to buy the members back into SERPS and had those payments treated as paid are in the table. Separate figures in respect of those cases where the employing company had become insolvent are not available.

Year	Number of schemes
1978-79	[1]—
1979-80	[1]—
1980-81	9
1981-82	nil
1982-83	6
1983-84	38
1984-85	55
1985-86	60
1986-87	119
1987-88	97
1988-89	74
1989-90	63
1990-91	49
[2]1991-92	47

Notes:

[1] Information not available.
[2] (to date).

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on how many occasions the Occupational Pension Board has used the powers under the Social Security Pensions Act 1975 to prevent breaches in the conditions upon which a contracting out certificate has been granted.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 February 1992]:* I understand from the Occupational Pensions Board that the number of individual contracting out certificates cancelled because of a salary-related occupational pension scheme's failure to meet the financial requirements set by the board has been as follows:

	Number
1981	3
1982	12
1983	19
1984	28
1985	30
1986	29
1987	23
1988	18
1989	107
1990	81
1991	100
[1]1992	Nil

[1] To date.

Note: The upturn since 1989 in the main reflects problems experienced in one life office responsible for a large number of small schemes.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list which pension issues he has referred to the Occupational Pensions Board for its consideration; and if he will list the reports the Occupational Pensions Board has made in respect to each of these references.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 7 February 1992]:* In fulfilling specific remits from successive Secretaries of State under section 66 of the Social Security Act 1973, the Occupational Pensions Board has considered and reported on the following issues:

Solvency, Disclosure of Information and Member Participation in Occupational Pension Schemes
(Cmnd. 5904: February 1975);

Equal Status for Men and Women in Occupational Pension Schemes
(Cmnd. 6599: August 1976);

Occupational Pension Scheme Cover for Disabled People
(Cmnd. 6849: June 1977);

Improved Protection for the Occupational Pension Rights and Expectations of early leavers
(Cmnd. 8271: June 1981);

Greater Security for the Rights and Expectations of Members of Occupational Pension Schemes
(Cmnd. 8649: October 1982);

Protecting Pensions: Safeguarding Benefits in a Changing Environment
(Cm. 573: February 1989).

The terms of reference for each remit are in each of the reports, copies of which are available in the Library.

In addition, the board has reported on numerous sets of draft regulations referred to it for consideration.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the company in each case where he has used his powers since 1979 to provide guaranteed minimum pensions after insolvency; and what was *(a)* the total cost and *(b)* the average remaining pension shortfall in each case.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* The information is not available in the form requested because the Department deals with pension schemes rather than with the associated companies. Records are not, therefore, maintained of the companies concerned. Similarly, the remaining pension shortfall after the members' rights in SERPS have been restored is not known. The number of occupational pension schemes winding up, for whatever reason, with insufficient funds to buy the members back into SERPS, the amounts for buying back into SERPS that have been treated as paid and the amounts of those payments subsequently recovered are in the table. Separate information in respect of cases where an associated employer has become insolvent is not collected.

Year	*Number of schemes involved*	*Amount treated as paid (£000)*	*Amount recovered (£000)*
1978-79	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
1979-80	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
1980-81	9	8	Nil
1981-82	Nil	Nil	Nil
1982-83	6	8	5
1983-84	38	162	25
1984-85	55	48	18
1985-86	60	75	39
1986-87	119	224	113
1987-88	97	105	28
1988-89	74	122	39
1989-90	63	153	91
1990-91	49	96	55
[2]1991-92	47	150	33

[1] Information not available.
[2] To date.

Benefit Deductions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households, from data taken for the annual statistical inquiry, in 1990 and 1991, are having weekly deductions made from their supplementary benefit or income support, as appropriate, for electricity and how many for gas *(a)* under £2 per week and *(b)* in each £1 band above £2 per week up to £40 per week.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 13 February 1992]:* The information required for 1990 on deductions from income support for electricity and gas is given in the table. No data are currently available from the 1991 Annual Statistical Enquiry.

	Cases with deductions for Electricity	*Cases with deductions for Gas*
Total number of cases with deductions	98,000	122,500
£0·01 to £1·99	2,500	1,000
£2.00	500	500
£2·01 to £3·00	4,500	2,000
£3·01 to £4·00	7,000	6,000
£4·01 to £5·00	6,500	7,500
£5·01 to £6·00	8,500	9,500
£6·01 to £7·00	8,000	10,000
£7·01 to £8·00	9,000	15,500
£8·01 to £9·00	9,000	17,500
£9·01 to £10·00	7,000	13,000
£10·01 to £11·00	7,000	11,000
£11·01 to £12·00	4,000	10,000
£12·01 to £13·00	4,500	6,000
£13·01 to £14·00	5,000	6,000
£14·01 to £15·00	2,500	3,000
£15·01 to £16·00	1,500	1,500
£16·01 to £17·00	2,500	500
£17·01 to £18·00	1,500	1,000
£18·01 to £19·00	2,000	500
£19·01 to £20·00	2,000	—
£20·01 to £21·00	500	500
£21·01 to £22·00	500	—
£22·01 to £23·00	500	—
£23·01 to £24·00	500	—
£24·01 to £25·00	—	—
£25·01 to £26·00	500	—
£26·01 to £27·00	500	—
£27·01 to £28·00	—	—
£28·01 to £29·00	—	—
£29·01 to £30·00	—	—
£30·01 to £31·00	—	—
£31·01 to £32·00	—	—
£32·01 to £33·00	—	—
£33·01 to £34·00	—	—
£34·01 to £35·00	—	—
£35·01 to £36·00	—	—

Note: All figures have been rounded to the nearest five hundred. Totals will therefore not match those figures published in the Annual Statistical Enquiry.

Source: Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiry 1990.

SCOTLAND

Privatisation (Forestry Commission)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 30 January, *Official Report*, columns *633-34*, if he will make a statement on the basis of the calculation of the privatisation proceeds of the Forestry Commission for 1991-92; how much land he expects to be sold; and how much income has been received to date.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The sum of £16 million quoted in the answer to which the hon. Member refers is the estimated proceeds from the disposal of Forestry Commission land and buildings in 1991-92, as part of the programme of disposals announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), on 16 June 1989, *Official Report*, columns *544-45*. The commission expects to sell about 10,000 hectares during the year. Some £12 million had been received by 21 January, the latest date for which figures are available.

Industrial Diseases

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to speed up the fixing of hearing dates for compensation claims made by retired industrial workers suffering terminal illnesses.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Law Commission will shortly be publishing a report on the adverse effects created by the death of parties pursuing certain types of reparation action: the report will pave the way for a reform of the present law.

Expedited ie "fast stream" procedures for the disposal of certain repatriation actions already exist in the supreme courts and the courts are aware of the need to accelerate in-court procedures where special circumstances apply, subject always to the need to preserve the rights and interests of all parties to a litigation.

In regard to the sheriff courts, the Sheriff Court Rules Council is currently considering proposals for reducing delays in disposing of actions generally, including compensation claims of the type referred to, and a working group is currently examining ways of improving the programming and scheduling of court business.

Prison Service

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the future organisation of the Scottish Prison Service.

Mr. Lang: I have decided that, under the "next steps" initiative, the Scottish Prison Service will become an Executive Agency within the Scottish Office Home and Health Department. I intend that this should be from 1 April 1993. Consultations with the trade unions will begin shortly.

Traffic Systems, Hawick

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement outlining the current timetable for consideration of the internal traffic management systems in Hawick; and when he now expects to be in a position to authorise the funds and capital consents required to enable work to start to alleviate the current congestion.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* I expect a report on proposals to provide improved traffic management in Hawick to be submitted to the Secretary of State by Borders regional council in the course of the next two to three months. Until this report is available it is not possible to estimate the level of funding which would be required.

A7, Hawick

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) whether he is yet in a position to authorise the local roads authority to make progress on any significant road improvement schemes on the A7 trunk route south of Hawick; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what progress has been made to date on the possibility of improving the A7 trunk route south of Hawick at Colterscleuch; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* The work undertaken by the A7 management group, in their second interim report, has allowed the identification of sites at Colterscleuch and between Mosspeeble and Bush as presenting opportunities for the creation of new high quality overtaking sections. Borders regional council and Dumfries and Galloway regional council have therefore been commissioned to carry out design work on two "convoy buster" schemes on the A7 at these sites. These schemes will provide important overtaking opportunities for drivers who can find themselves stuck in convoys for some miles on sections of this route even though traffic is light. The schemes should ease hold-ups, relieve driver frustration and reduce the temptation for reckless overtaking on the road between Hawick and the English border. This design work will start in advance of the conclusion of the full study. Approval for the construction phase will be considered as soon as the design and any necessary statutory procedures and land acquisition have been completed.

"Convoy busting" schemes such as the two to be designed for the A7 are being developed on a number of Scottish long-distance single carriageway trunk roads as a means of securing real and rapid improvements for drivers on lightly trafficked routes without the inevitable delay and costs associated with complete re-engineering of a route. In many cases wholesale re-engineering cannot be justified given the high cost and limited traffic.

Excellent progress has also been made in implementing accident remedial measures at ten locations between Hawick and the Border since our proposals were set out in the A7 pamphlet published last year. I look forward to the completion of this work during the current financial year.

I am confident that these measures will bring direct benefits to many drivers through improved journey times and safer driving conditions.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to improve the collection

of information on road traffic accidents which are occurring on the A7 trunk route between Hawick and Langholm and which are not being reported; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on all injury road accidents reported to the police is provided to the Scottish Office as part of a Great Britain wide system on a report form called stat 19. Damage-only accidents do not have to be reported to the police by drivers and information on them is not therefore collected by the Scottish office. There is no intention of changing this position either for all Scotland or for the A7.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Service

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table showing, for each of the last three years for which figures are available, how many applications were received and processed for posts in *(a)* the Civil Service in Northern Ireland, *(b)* the Housing Executive, *(c)* each health and social services board and *(d)* each education and library board; and how many employees each of these bodies had at the beginning of each such year and the end of the last year.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested insofar as it can be readily provided is set out in the following tables.

Applications received and processed

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Civil Service	10,153	20,991	24,960	8,231
Housing Executive[1]	—	—	7,000	4,500
Health and Social Services Boards[1]:—				
Eastern	—	—	28,456	—
Northern	—	—	11,131	—
Southern	—	—	7,825	—
Western	—	—	10,774	—
Education and Library Boards[1]:—				
Belfast	—	—	8,776	6,906
North-Eastern	—	—	6,450	5,302
South-Eastern	—	—	6,685	5,633
Southern	—	—	6,368	8,087
Western	—	—	5,241	6,716

Notes:

1. Information about applications in the calendar year prior to 1990 is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.
2. All applications received are processed.

Staff in Posts

	Beginning 1988	*Beginning 1989*	*Beginning 1990*	*Beginning 1991*	*End 1991*
Civil Service	—	29,222	29,751	29,469	28,864
Housing Executive	5,113	5,299	5,374	5,051	—
Health and Social Services Boards:					
Eastern	—	—	32,342	31,706	—
Northern	—	—	10,732	10,680	—
Southern	—	—	10,523	10,214	—
Western	—	—	8,750	8,839	—
Education and Library Boards					
Belfast	—	—	4,276	4,195	4,063
North-Eastern	—	—	5,505	5,775	5,908
South-Eastern	—	—	4,463	4,328	4,073
Southern	—	—	5,392	5,469	5,462
Western	—	—	5,035	5,050	5,098

Air Pollution

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps will be taken by the air quality monitoring network in Northern Ireland to reduce levels of air pollution.

Mr. Needham: The monitoring network is an independent, United Kingdom-wide system operated on behalf of the Department of the Environment. Its work is supplemented locally by the monitoring carried out by a number of district councils.

The data available from all the monitoring systems operating in Northern Ireland provide a basis from which air quality guidelines and targets can be set, and assessments can be made of the efficacy of measures to cut urban pollution. Such measures include the continued introduction of smoke control areas; proposed regulations to control the composition and sale of certain fuels in smoke control areas; catalytic converters in all new petrol-engined cars from 1 January 1993; new MOT emission tests; and tough new standards for diesel vehicles.

Textile Industry

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he will take to assist job creation in the textile industry in the constituency of South Down; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The south Down area benefits from the wide range of measures currently undertaken by the Government to promote economic and industrial development throughout Northern Ireland.

Training Statistics

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been registered on *(a)* job training programmes and *(b)* youth training programmes in the constituency of South Down since 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1991 and from 1 April 1991 to 31 December 1991; and, of these, how many have received full-time employment.

Mr. Needham: From 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1991, 1,436 adults and 2,209 young people and from 1 April 1991

to 31 December 1991, 632 adults and 868 young people entered the job training programme and youth training programme respectively in the constituency of South Down.

Information on the destination of these precise cohorts of entrants is not available. However during the periods mentioned the numbers leaving the job training programme and the youth training programme in this area who were known to have moves into employment were as follows:

	Adults	*Young people*
1 April 1988 to 31 March 1991	362	830
1 April 1991 to 31 December 1991	231	286

In addition, at 31 December 1991, there were 178 trainees who had entered employment and whose training was continuing within the youth training programme.

Equal Opportunities Commission

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the members of the Equal Opportunities Commission; how many persons are employed by the Commission; and how many of these employees are from the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities.

Mr. Needham: The members of the Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland are as follows:

Mrs. Mary Clark-Glass (Chairman)
Mr. R. A. Coughlin
Mr. S. B. Dickson
Mrs. P. Feeney
Ms. A. Hegarty
Ms. P. McKeown
Ms. L. Walker
Ms. M. Young

There is currently one vacancy.

At 1 January 1992 the Commission employed 22 staff and, as indicated in the monitoring return due for submission to the Fair Employment Commission, the religious composition of these staff was as follows:

	Number
Protestant	12
Roman Catholic	9
Cannot be determined	1

Pay and Display Car Parks

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total income for each month to the Department of Environment (Northern Ireland) since the scheme came into operation from pay and display car parks in Larne, County Antrim; and what additional costs have been incurred per month for supervising pay and display car parks in Larne, County Antrim.

Mr. Needham: Since the scheme came into operation on 14 October 1991 the monthly income has been as follows:

	£
October	2,124
November	4,487
December	6,166
January	4,526

Supervision costs are approximately £1,100 per month.

Government Training Centres

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons are registered on waiting lists at each of the following government training centres *(a)* Felden, *(b)* Ballymena and *(c)* Ballymoney; and for how long each person has been awaiting training or re-qualification.

Mr. Needham: The following is the information:

Felden training centre—138 (of whom 50 are waiting for short computer courses).

Ballymena training centre—56 (of whom 21 are waiting for short computer courses).

Ballymoney training unit—6.

Information on the length of time that each person has been on the waiting lists could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make it possible for government training centres to purchase training from private sector providers or permit persons seeking training or requalification to do so at their nearest approved training facility even if it is in the private sector.

Mr. Needham: It is already possible for training centres of the Training and Employment Agency to purchase training from private and public sector providers in cases where the training required cannot be provided from the training centres' own resources. In practice, however, it is more usual for private sector providers to purchase training from the training centres. Persons seeking training or requalification may do so at any training facility regardless of whether it is in the private or public sector. Government financial support under the youth training and job training programme is available in each case.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what additional costs will be incurred to public expenditure on transport costs in respect of a trainee normally resident in Larne but required to travel for training to *(a)* Ballymena government training centre and *(b)* Ballymoney government training centre.

Mr. Needham: The following is the information.

Ballymena Training Centre
By Public Transport—£13·00 per week
By Private Transport—£42·43 per week

Ballymoney Training Unit
By Public Transport—£29·00 per week
By Private Transport—£50·00 per week.

Car Parking, Larne

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many vehicle parking spaces are available in Larne, County Antrim, for use under pay and display arrangements.

Mr. Needham: A total of 409.

Training

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has any plans to meet representatives of community-based training organisations or community workshops to discuss problems arising from block funding arrangements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: I met representatives of the Northern Ireland Association of Community-based Training Organisations to discuss funding issues on 19 February 1992.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applicants were transferred from the waiting list at Felden training centre during 1991-92 to waiting lists at other training centres.

Mr. Needham: During 1991-92 to date, 48 persons were transferred from the waiting list of Felden training centre to Boucher Road training centre and 29 persons from Felden training centre to Ballymena training centre. All such transfers are with the agreement of the individuals concerned.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what provision is being made for ex GEC/Alsthom employees who are now more than six months unemployed to obtain re-training and re-qualification.

Mr. Needham: Under the restart programme—for those unemployed for six months or more—interviews with ex-GEC Alsthom employees began on 15 January 1992.

To date, all 66 in this group have been interviewed. Twenty-five have made job applications, 17 have applied for training and 19 applied to a job club.

Of the remaining five, three have registered voluntarily for employment and two have been unable to accept any opportunities offered due to domestic circumstances.

Metal-framed Windows

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on which housing estates the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has replaced metal-framed windows in the past six years; and if he will indicate how old the houses are in each instance and the number of houses improved.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but I have been advised by the chairman that the information is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Annalong Harbour

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to make improvements to the harbour at Annalong, County Down.

Mr. Needham: None.

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have been charged with an offence under section 29 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991 or the equivalent offence in earlier Acts, giving the numbers charged in each calendar year since the creation of the offence.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* No persons have been charged with an offence under section 29 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991, nor with the equivalent offence introduced by section 11 of the 1987 Act.

DEFENCE

ELF Communications

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department is continuing research into extremely low frequency communications.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No. The MOD is currently not pursuing research into this field.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what quantities of *(a)* low level, *(b)* intermediate level and *(c)* high level radioactive wastes are currently stored at (i) Aldermaston, (ii) Burghfield and (iii) Llanishen; and if he will distinguish between materials being temporarily stored and those being permanently stored.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Wastes from all three sites for which a current national disposal route is available are stored on the sites temporarily only pending transfer to a disposal site. No high level waste is produced at any of the sites of the Atomic Weapons Establishment. Low level waste only is produced at Burghfield and Llanishen, and both low and intermediate level wastes are produced at Aldermaston. Long-term storage of wastes, for which no disposal route is currently available, is carried out in purpose-built stores at Aldermaston. The stores are subject to regular monitoring and surveillance, and constitute no danger to the public, the work force or the environment. At December 1991, which is the latest date for which figures are available, the volumes of wastes stored at Aldermaston are 1,800 cu/m of low level waste and 2,100 cu/m of intermediate level waste; at Burghfield no waste is stored; and at Llanishen 19 cu/m of low level waste only is stored.

Uranium

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to which subheads of which votes costs are attributed by his Department for enrichment in the United States of British uranium for defence purposes.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Such costs are attributed to class 1, vote 2—defence procurement. It would not be in the national interest to reveal further details of vote attribution.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there are continuing exchanges of British military plutonium for United States highly enriched uranium.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It would not be in the national interest to disclose such details of the nuclear procurement programme.

Atomic Weapons Establishment, Aldermaston

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date *(a)* design work and *(b)* white commissioning started for (i) the A89 building, (ii) the A90 building and (iii) the A91 building at AWE Aldermaston.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The dates for *(a)* design work and *(b)* white commissioning are as follows:

(i) A89—design work commenced in 1983; much of the building is already in use, white commissioning of the remainder will begin shortly.

(ii) A90—design work commenced in 1981; the early stages of white commissioning began in 1990.
(iii) A91—design work commenced in 1982; white commissioning began in 1990.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the problems with new building work at AWE Aldermaston has any implications for the dismantling of British nuclear weapons.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date building A45 at AWE Aldermaston was first declared operational.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The building was first declared operational in 1957.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the role and function of the A89 building at AWE Aldermaston; on what date construction work on this building commenced; on what date building work was completed; and on what date this building is scheduled to be operational.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: A89 provides office, laboratory and other facilities to support buildings concerned with the treatment of radioactive waste. Construction began in 1985 and was completed at the end of 1988. Part of the building is currently in full use, with the rest expected to come into operation later this year.

Trident

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the expenditure on the Trident programme in each year since the beginning of the programme expressed in *(a)* then year prices and *(b)* current prices.

Mr. Alan Clark: Expenditure each year since the beginning of the Trident programme is as follows:

£ million

Financial year	*Historical (Outturn) prices*	*Constant 1991-92 prices and £1 = $1·59*
1980-81	3	7
1981-82	30	55
1982-83	69	110
1983-84	92	128
1984-85	162	212
1985-86	264	352
1986-87	369	495
1987-88	579	738
1988-89	713	859
1989-90	923	1,073
1990-91	993	1,080
[1]1991-92	1,155	1,155

[1] The figure for 1991-92 is an estimate.

Nuclear-powered Submarines

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if any nuclear-powered submarines that have been decommissioned or are awaiting decommissioning have been moved since 22 July 1991.

Mr. Alan Clark: No, other than small distances within naval bases.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how long his Department has been carrying out feasibility studies into the options for the disposal of nuclear-powered submarines.

Mr. Alan Clark: Following a decision in 1989 not to pursue the immediate sea disposal of HMS Dreadnought, studies were initiated into alternative methods of disposal for decommissioned nuclear submarines. These studies continue.

Terrorists (Dependants' Claims)

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many claims have been made against the Ministry of Defence by dependants of terrorists killed by the security forces in line of duty in the last five years; and what sums were paid in compensation in each of these claims.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Claims data are not maintained in the format requested. The recorded data does not distinguish between dependants of terrorists and others.

Arms Control Implementation Group

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost to date for the maintenance and operation of the joint arms control implementation group; and what commitments have been made to support the group in its role.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The joint arms control implementation group (JACIG) was established at RAF Scampton in 1990 and became fully operational on 1 January 1991. Since then, JACIG has been involved in a full programme of training, exercises and evaluation visits, thus ensuring that inspections in the United Kingdom and overseas are conducted effectively and in accordance with the terms and spirit of the Vienna document and INF treaty; and of the CFE treaty once it enters into force. The initial setting-up cost for JACIG was £1·4 million at current prices; running costs have totalled £3·2 million at current prices to date.

Seismic Monitoring

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution United Kingdom scientists have made to the group of scientific experts on technical test 2 seismic monitoring system established in April 1991 by the group of scientific experts of the United Nations Committee on Disarmament.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The group of scientific experts (GSE), a group established under the auspices of the United Nations conference on disarmament, set up a six week experiment called the GSE technical test. The United Kingdom participated fully in this experiment which involved the transmission of data of each seismic disturbance detected by the United Kingdom national seismic station located at Eskdalemuir, Scotland. The data were used by experimental international data centres to produce a daily bulletin of seismic disturbances.

Type 22 Frigates

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 13 February, *Official Report*, column *632*, how many of the type 22 batch 1

frigates have been modified to provide extra accommodation for young officers; at what cost; how many officers will undertake initial sea training in each ship; for what periods of time; and how many type 22 batch 1 frigates will at any one time be unavailable for normal operations as a result.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Three type 22 batch 1 frigates have been converted: HMS Broadsword, HMS Brazen and HMS Brilliant, HMS Battleaxe is to follow later in the year. The cost of these modifications to date has been in the order of £514,000.

The modification provides extra accommodation on each ship for up to 65 young officers who will undertake initial sea training (IST) for eight weeks, seven of which are spent at sea. IST will not affect the operational availability of these ships.

Tugs

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 12 February, *Official Report*, columns *511-12*, whether the costs of the new tugs Impetus and Impulse will be attributed to the Trident programme.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 21 February 1992

HOME DEPARTMENT

Grendon Prison

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are awaiting admission to Grendon prison.

Mrs. Rumbold: A total of 245 prisoners were on the waiting list for transfer to Grendon prison on 14 February 1992.

Filipino Wives

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Filipino wives of British husbands have been refused entry to the United Kingdom since August 1988; and how many have been admitted.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is available only in respect of such wives applying in the Philippines for entry clearance for settlement in the years 1990 and 1991. This is given in the table.

Annual figures on admissions of wives or fiancees of Filipino nationality are published in table 1 of Cm 1571, "Control of Immigration: Statistics, United Kingdom 1990", a copy of which is in the Library. These admission figures include Filipino wives and fiancees granted entry clearance other than in the Philippines and any joining non-British husbands settled in the United Kingdom. They do not take account of the year in which the entry clearance was granted.

Estimated number of Filipino wives of British husbands applying for a settlement entry clearance in Manila

Year	Entry clearance applications Granted[1]	Refused initially[2]
1990	200	110
1991	200	140

[1] Including granted on appeal.
[2] Some may be subsequently granted on appeal.

Unlawful Killings, Lambeth

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many unlawful killings took place in Lambeth in 1991.

Mr. John Patten: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that there were 19 unlawful killings in the borough of Lambeth in 1991.

"Getaway"

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to the representations made to him by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill concerning the publication and sale of manuals on sale at Soldier of Fortune shops in Liverpool; what steps he is taking to ban their publication; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I understand that the hon. Member wrote to my right hon. Friend on 18 February about the sale of a book entitled "Getaway" which is alleged to contain information on illegal and dangerous ways of driving.

Ministers do not have the power to ban or censor books or other publications. However, it is an offence to publish a work which is obscene, which incites its readers to crime, or which is otherwise a breach of the criminal law. It is for the police to investigate any allegation of an offence and for the courts to decide whether an offence has been committed in any particular case; Ministers cannot intervene in either of these processes. I understand that in this particular case the owners of the shops concerned have decided to withdraw the book from sale.

Project Comtram

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to sustain Project Comtram and the community lawyer scheme, funded under section 11, in Bradford; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Decisions on the eligibility of projects for funding under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 have been made in accordance with policy and administrative criteria laid down under new arrangements for the administration of the grant which were announced in October 1990, when local authorities were invited to bid afresh for funding from 1 April 1992. Applicants were required to demonstrate that proposals were within the policy criteria and fulfilled key requirements of a procedure designed to ensure that the available funding is targeted to achieve maximum benefit for members of ethnic minorities. Applications for the projects in question failed in key respects and were not approved.

Criminal Justice Act 1991

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to bring the remaining provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 into force.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have today made a commencement order which will bring into force from 1 October 1992 most of the remaining provisions of the Act, including the bulk of the new sentencing framework. The order will also bring into force from 1 April 1992 the provisions relating to the inner London probation area (section 75) and court security officers (sections 76 to 79). A consultation paper setting out detailed proposals for implementing the provisions on curfew orders and electronic monitoring (sections 12 to 13) will be issued shortly, and these provisions will be brought into force as soon as possible after consultation. The provision in section 60 which will replace remand to custody for 15 to 16-year-old boys by remand to local authority secure accommodation will be implemented when sufficient local authority secure accommodation is available.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Sunday Trading

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, what response they have received to their letters as shareholders to public companies allegedly in breach of the Shops Act 1950; and what further action they intend to take.

Mr. Alison: Those companies to which the commissioners wrote whose stores had opened on Sundays took the line that the law was unsatisfactory and in need of reform, that they had not particularly wanted to open on Sundays but felt under pressure to do so from competitors. The commissioners will continue to monitor the situation.

EMPLOYMENT

Pay Statistics

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the information on full-time workers' pay for the west midlands and, if available, cities and counties within the region, and for comparison England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as given for Scottish regions in his answer to the hon. Member for Angus, East, (Mr. Welsh) on 6 February *Official Report*, columns *266-69*.

Mr. Forth: The information available from the "New Earnings Survey", closest to that requested, is given in the tables.

Full time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence: Percentage with weekly earnings (including overtime) below the following specified amounts

April 1991

	£130	£140	£180	£190
Manual women				
West Midlands region	37·6	46·3	77·8	82·6
West Midlands MC	37·3	44·3	76·4	83·0
Hereford and Worcester	35·6	52·9	77·9	81·7
Shropshire	39·4	50·0	84·8	87·9
Staffordshire	39·4	46·8	76·9	79·6
Warwickshire	36·1	44·4	83·3	86·1
England	34·0	42·7	71·7	76·5
Scotland	39·2	48·1	75·9	80·7
Wales	36·6	48·9	76·8	80·6
Northern Ireland	51·1	61·1	84·4	87·0
Non-manual women				
West Midlands region	12·4	18·0	44·7	50·5
West Midlands MC	10·6	15·2	40·4	46·7
Hereford and Worcester	12·7	21·1	49·5	55·9
Shropshire	19·7	28·0	55·5	60·1
Staffordshire	15·8	21·9	48·2	53·0
Warwickshire	10·9	15·3	50·8	55·2
England	9·0	13·1	34·1	39·1
Scotland	12·4	17·7	42·6	48·1
Wales	15·4	20·2	44·4	50·8
Northern Ireland	17·9	22·2	42·4	47·1
All women				
West Midlands region	18·0	24·2	52·0	57·6
West Midlands MC	15·9	21·0	47·6	53·9
Hereford and Worcester	17·7	28·1	55·7	61·6
Shropshire	24·3	33·1	62·3	66·5
Staffordshire	22·4	28·8	56·2	60·4
Warwickshire	16·6	21·9	58·1	62·2
England	13·5	18·4	40·9	45·9
Scotland	17·9	23·9	49·4	54·7
Wales	20·3	26·8	51·8	57·7
Northern Ireland	25·6	31·2	52·1	56·4

Source: New Earnings Survey.

Full-time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence: Percentage with weekly earnings (including overtime) below the following specified amounts

April 1991

	£130	£140	£180	£190
Manual men				
West Midlands region	4·7	7·0	22·5	27·3
West Midlands MC	4·4	6·6	18·8	23·2
Hereford and Worcester	4·6	7·7	30·9	35·7
Shropshire	3·4	6·2	25·5	32·0
Staffordshire	5·9	8·2	27·3	32·9
Warwickshire	5·1	6·8	20·8	24·7
England	4·6	6·7	21·2	26·1
Scotland	6·8	9·3	26·0	31·4
Wales	6·4	10·0	26·8	32·1
Northern Ireland	13·7	18·5	40·5	46·8
Non-manual men				
West Midlands region	3·1	4·5	12·5	14·8
West Midlands MC	3·2	4·6	12·1	14·3
Hereford and Worcester	2·3	3·3	10·5	13·9
Shropshire	2·7	3·1	11·9	15·0
Staffordshire	3·9	5·3	15·6	17·9
Warwickshire	2·4	4·8	11·8	12·4
England	2·3	3·4	9·9	11·9
Scotland	3·1	4·7	12·2	14·7
Wales	3·5	4·9	14·1	16·1
Northern Ireland	7·2	9·7	16·4	19·7
All men				
West Midlands region	3·9	5·8	17·7	21·3
West Midlands MC	3·8	5·6	15·4	18·7
Hereford and Worcester	3·5	5·7	21·5	25·7
Shropshire	3·1	4·9	19·9	25·0
Staffordshire	5·0	6·9	22·1	26·2
Warwickshire	3·7	5·8	16·3	18·6
England	3·3	4·9	15·1	18·4
Scotland	4·9	7·0	19·2	23·2
Wales	5·1	7·7	21·0	24·8
Northern Ireland	10·5	14·1	28·6	33·4

Source: New Earnings Survey.

Full time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence: Percentage with weekly earnings (excluding overtime) below the following specified amounts

April 1991

	£130	£140	£180	£190
Manual women				
West Midlands region	42·2	52·1	83·7	88·1
West Midlands MC	41·1	50·8	82·0	87·3
Hereford and Worcester	41·3	57·7	86·5	90·4
Shropshire	47·0	60·6	93·9	97·0
Staffordshire	44·0	50·5	81·0	84·3
Warwickshire	40·3	48·6	88·9	93·1
England	37·7	47·4	77·4	81·9
Scotland	42·1	52·8	83·3	87·3
Wales	40·9	53·8	82·8	85·7
Northern Ireland	—	—	—	—
Non-manual women				
West Midlands region	13·4	19·6	47·4	53·1
West Midlands MC	11·4	16·8	43·7	49·7
Hereford and Worcester	14·1	23·0	50·5	57·0
Shropshire	21·1	29·8	58·7	62·8
Staffordshire	17·1	23·3	50·4	56·0
Warwickshire	11·3	16·5	52·8	56·0
England	9·8	14·3	36·1	41·3
Scotland	14·0	19·4	45·5	50·8
Wales	16·7	21·4	46·2	52·7
Northern Ireland	—	—	—	—
All women				
West Midlands region	19·8	26·8	55·4	60·8
West Midlands MC	17·3	23·6	51·3	57·2
Hereford and Worcester	20·0	30·6	58·4	64·3
Shropshire	27·1	37·0	66·9	70·8

	£130	£140	£180	£190
Staffordshire	24·6	30·8	58·9	63·9
Warwickshire	17·8	23·7	60·9	64·4
England	14·9	20·3	43·6	48·6
Scotland	19·7	26·2	53·2	58·2
Wales	22·2	28·8	54·6	60·3
Northern Ireland	—	—	—	—

Source: New Earnings Survey.
Note: "—" denotes information not available.

Full time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence: Percentage with weekly earnings (excluding overtime) below the following specified amounts

April 1991

	£130	£140	£180	£190
Manual men				
West Midlands region	7·2	11·1	34·1	40·5
West Midlands MC	6·4	10·0	28·4	35·0
Hereford and Worcester	7·2	13·3	47·7	52·1
Shropshire	6·8	11·5	42·2	50·9
Staffordshire	9·2	12·8	41·3	47·9
Warwickshire	7·7	10·7	28·0	32·7
England	6·7	10·3	32·1	38·5
Scotland	9·2	13·7	39·4	46·6
Wales	8·6	13·7	38·1	45·9
Northern Ireland	—	—	—	—
Non-manual men				
West Midlands region	3·8	5·4	14·8	17·3
West Midlands MC	3·9	5·4	14·6	17·1
Hereford and Worcester	2·6	3·6	12·3	15·2
Shropshire	2·7	4·0	15·5	19·5
Staffordshire	5·0	6·8	17·5	19·6
Warwickshire	3·3	5·1	13·9	15·1
England	2·7	4·1	11·8	14·0
Scotland	3·7	5·7	14·4	17·1
Wales	4·4	6·1	15·9	18·4
Northern Ireland	—	—	—	—
All men				
West Midlands region	5·6	8·3	24·8	29·3
West Midlands MC	5·1	7·7	21·4	26·0
Hereford and Worcester	5·1	8·9	31·4	35·1
Shropshire	5·1	8·4	31·2	38·0
Staffordshire	7·3	10·1	30·6	35·2
Warwickshire	5·5	7·9	21·0	24·0
England	4·5	6·9	21·0	25·1
Scotland	6·5	9·8	27·1	32·1
Wales	6·7	10·2	28·0	33·4
Northern Ireland	—	—	—	—

Source: New Earnings Survey.
Note: "—" denotes information not available.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Foxes

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what information he has as to the number of foxes living in the larger urban areas of Great Britain; and how the density of the fox population in urban areas compares with that in rural areas;

(2) what surveys his Department has carried out into the health hazards associated with the presence of foxes in urban areas.

Mr. Maclean: The average fox population density in cities varies between 1:2·24 fox families per square kilometre. However higher densities are found in some cities up to 8·5 adult foxes per square kilometre. In rural areas fox densities vary widely, depending on habitat, between one fox per 30 hectares in rich habitats to one pair per 4,000 hectares in poor habitats. This Department has not carried out any surveys into health hazards associated with urban foxes, but they can become infected with a variety of parasites and diseases, including rabies.

Common Agricultural Policy Fraud

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the prospects of eliminating fraud in European Community matters, in particular that associated with the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Curry: The United Kingdom remains at the forefront of the fight against fraud in the European Community. In particular, the United Kingdom continues to press the European Commission for further action to implement, and update, measures included in the 45-point anti-fraud programme adopted in 1989 with our strong support. Substantial progress has already been made; measures in connection with the common agricultural policy include:

- mandatory minimum levels of physical checks on export refunds
- strengthened requirements for annual stocktaking of intervention stocks
- improved procedures for reporting irregularities
- improved procedures for auditing payments
- the inclusion of improved control arrangements in regulations implementing common agricultural policy schemes

ENERGY

Advertising

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how much money was spent on media advertising in February and March 1990 concerning energy efficiency and global warming; and how many coupons requesting booklets were subsequently received as a result of the advertising campaign.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The cost of the March 1990 advertising campaign was £405,959.15; 9,034 information packs were subsequently dispatched.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the expenditure incurred on *(a)* the assisted places scheme and *(b)* city technology colleges in each year of the programmes so far, together with the proposed expenditure in future years.

Mr. Eggar: The assisted places scheme was launched in 1981. The city technology colleges programme was launched in 1986. Actual Government expenditure to 1990-91 and estimated and planned expenditure for future years on the APS and the CTC programme are shown in the table. In addition, private sponsors have pledged well over £30 million to the CTC programme.

Table

Financial Year	(a) Assisted Places Scheme £ million	(b) City Technology Colleges £ million
1981-82 (outturn)	3	—
1982-83 (outturn)	9	—
1983-84 (outturn)	15	—
1984-85 (outturn)	22	—
1985-86 (outturn)	30	—
1986-87 (outturn)	38	—
1987-88 (outturn)	46	1
1988-89 (outturn)	51	14
1989-90 (outturn)	57	30
1990-91 (outturn)	63	58
1991-92 (estimated outturn)	65	51
1992-93 (plans)	78	54
1993-94 (plans)	84	55
1994-95 (plans)	89	56

Notes: The figures are cash plans rounded to the nearest £ million.

Research (Diseases)

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will state the overall figure spent by the Medical Research Council into research into diseases affecting older people in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Most diseases affect people of all ages and become more critical in old age. Total expenditure by the MRC over the last five years on all research, including training awards and fellowships, has been:

	£ Thousands
1986-87	125,188
1987-88	135,195
1988-89	149,779
1989-90	172,346
1990-91	181,077

By far the greater part of all that research is potentially relevant to improving the health of any age group, including older people.

Books and Equipment

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the most recent figure for annual expenditure on books and equipment in schools, excluding provision for 16 to 19-year-olds.

Mr. Fallon: In 1989-90, the latest year for which actual spending information is available, expenditure in England on books and equipment in nursery, primary, secondary and special schools was some £390 million. Expenditure on provision for 16 to 19-year-olds is not separately identified and is included within this total.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the most recent figure for the annual cost of teacher salaries.

Mr. Fallon: In 1989-90, the latest year for which actual spending information is available, expenditure in England on teaching staff in nursery, primary, secondary and special schools was some £7,339 million. This includes gross pay and employers' contributions to national insurance and superannuation.

Student Loans

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his estimate of the cost of student loans in each of the next 10 years.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Student loans are available for all eligible students who apply for them. Levels of expenditure on loans depend on the level of demand and the rates and conditions of loans prescribed in the statutory regulations for each year.

Table 1 in the departmental report of the Department of Education and Science (Cm 1911) sets out planned net public expenditure provision for England and Wales of £137 million for 1992-93, £204 million for 1993-94 and £286 million for 1994-95. We shall review the expenditure plans for future years—and the underlying planning assumptions—in successive public expenditure surveys.

Nursery Education

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his Department's estimate of the extra revenue costs of extending nursery places to 80 per cent. of three and four-year-olds.

Mr. Eggar: The extra revenue costs are difficult to estimate since they would depend on the types of provision and on the precise balance between full-time and part-time attendance. Assuming the current mix of types of provision and modes of attendance, a broad extrapolation from the estimated cost per pupil for all forms of provision made by local education authorities for the under-fives[1] suggests an extra annual recurrent cost of approximately £530 million at 1991-92 prices. In addition there would be capital costs; and costs would also be incurred in training or retaining the additional teaching and ancillary staff who would be needed.

[1] Table 2 of DES departmental report "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1992-93 to 1994-95", Cm 1911.

Further Education

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his estimate of the average hourly cost of a part-time place in a further education college.

Mr. Eggar: The average hourly cost for students in all modes of attendance in a further education college was £2·80 in 1988-89 (the latest year available). There are no figures available for part-time students separately.

Student Fees

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his Department's estimate of the cost of extending an entitlement to student fees to part-time students on higher education courses.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The cost would depend on what decisions were taken about eligible courses, their duration, the maximum fee entitlement and the account to be taken of the personal circumstances of potentially eligible students.

Special Needs Education

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the most recent figure for annual expenditure on services for children with special needs.

Mr. Fallon: In 1989-90, the latest year for which actual spending information is available, school-based expenditure in special schools in England was some £688 million. Expenditure in primary and secondary schools on services for children with special needs attending such schools is not collected separately. The figure for special schools does not include costs of services such as child guidance and educational psychology provided centrally by local education authorities, nor of LEAs' central administration to support special education, as these costs were not apportioned between services in LEAs' expenditure returns.

Student Grants

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his estimate of the cost of uprating the student grant to allow for inflation since it was last uprated.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The cost of increasing the main rates of grant payable under the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations 1991 in line with with the Government's current estimate of inflation since those rates were last increased in 1990 would be £66·4 million. This figure assumes student numbers to be consistent with the autumn statement and that no other provisions of the regulations are changed.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Egypt

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to contribute to the social fund project in Egypt to mitigate the social impact of economic reform; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We are participating substantially in the social fund project through our share of International Development Association and European Community contributions. Our bilateral aid programme for Egypt is fully allocated to other priority development areas agreed with the Egyptian Government.

CIS

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional staff have been recruited to deal with aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States by *(a)* the Overseas Development Administration and *(b)* the EC.

Mrs. Chalker: *(a)* At present we have 34 staff from the Overseas Development Administration dealing with aid to the Commonwealth of Indpependent States and other eastern European countries. Precise disaggregation would not be realistic. Individuals have not been recruited specifically for these positions, but additional staff have been recruited generally to the ODA to permit the expansion in our activities.

(b) An additional 40 mecu has now been agreed to reinforce the Commission's external activities. We understand that its intention is to establish at least 140 now posts in DGI and convert a further 150 from expert to statutory posts. Many of these additional posts will support the Community aid programmes in the Commonwealth of Independent States.

United Nations Funding

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will review the decision no to fund the second phase of the United Nations international fund for agricultural development.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 12 February at column *528*.

PRIME MINISTER

London School of Economics

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the action necessary by the relevant Government Departments for the London School of Economics to be successful in its bid to move to the old London county council building on the south bank.

The Prime Minister: The London School of Economics has as yet made no formal bid to the London Residuary Body, which is responsible to the local taxpayers of London for the disposal of county hall, for the acquisition of the site. Should it do so my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science would then be in a position to consider the matter in consultation with the residuary body.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Appeals, North East Region

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of appeals heard and decided by tribunals concerning *(a)* mobility allowances, *(b)* attendance allowances, *(c)* invalidity benefit, *(d)* injury and disablement benefit and *(e)* non-income related benefit in the North East region in the last two years.

Mr. Scott: The latest available annual statistics for social security appeal tribunals and medical appeal tribunals are for the year ending December 1990. The relevant information for the north-east region is given in the tables.

Social security appeal tribunals	*Heard and decided appeals*	
	Year ending December 1989	*Year ending December 1990*
Mobility allowance	214	223
Attendance allowance	23	28
Invalidity benefit	1,418	1,354
Disablement benefit	459	637
Child benefit	233	271
Invalid care allowance	73	57
Maternity allowance	16	16
Retirement pension	167	168

Social security appeal tribunals	Heard and decided appeals Year ending December 1989	Year ending December 1990
Severe disablement allowance	26	23
Unemployment benefit	2,787	2,194
Widows benefit	115	82

Medical appeal tribunals	Heard and decided appeals [1]Six months ending December 1989	Year ending December 1990
Mobility allowance	178	1,206
Severe disablement allowance	36	224
Disablement benefit	150	1,900

[1] Medical appeal tribunal statistics were collected from 1 July 1989.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's estimate of the cost of restoring student entitlement to housing benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: Based on information available when the new arrangements for student benefit entitlement were introduced, the estimated cost of restoring housing benefit entitlement to those students who are not currently eligible is estimated to be around £70 million at current prices.

Income Support

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out his Department's management statistics for the total number of claimants on income support, plus separately their partners and dependants, for each month since January 1990.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not available. Liveload figures based on May 1990 annual statistical enquiry, the latest date for which information is available, are as follows.

	Number
Total number of claimants:	4,180,000
Total number of partners:	691,000
Total number of dependent children:	2,045,000

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiry 1990.

Pensions

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security why the increase promised by the Secretary of State, in his statement on 21 October 1991, to pensioners over the age of 80 years, and which is to be effective from 1 April 1992, does not appear in newly issued pension books.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and Public Information Office.

Income Support

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's estimate of the cost of restoring student entitlement to income support during the summer; and what was the cost in the last year before it was removed.

Miss Widdecombe: The estimated expenditure on income support for students during the 1990 summer vacation was about £27 million. The estimated cost of restoring student entitlement to income support during the summer vacations, based on information available when the present arrangements were introduced, would be around £30 million at current prices.

WALES

Dispensing Pharmacists

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many prescription items were dispensed by retail pharmacists in Wales in each year from 1977 onwards; and if he will publish the figures according to age categories of the consumers.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information on the number of prescription items dispensed is given in the table.

	Prescription items dispensed (thousands)
1977	22,801
1978	23,853
1979	23,600
1980	23,676
1981	23,430
1982	24,033
1983	24,594
1984	24,966
1985	24,738
1986	25,083
1987	26,647
1988	27,072
1989	27,761
1990	28,299

It is not possible to give numbers of prescription items dispensed according to the age of the consumer. However, the following table gives, for the years for which data are available, an estimate of the percentage of prescriptions which were exempt from charges by reason of age.

	Category of exemption Under 16[1]	Retirement age[2]
1983	14	42
1984	14	47
1985	14	45
1986	13	45
1987	[3]N/A	[3]N/A
1988	13	50
1989	12	50
1990	12	52

[1] Children aged under 16 and children aged under 19 in full-time education.
[2] Women aged 60 or over and men aged 65 or over.
[3] Not available.

Archaeological Excavations

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the instances in the past 12 months in which Monmouth borough council has *(a)* imposed a watching brief condition on the advice of Glamorgan and Gwent archaeological trust or *(b)* required preservation in situ or archaeological excavation in advance of development.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This information is not held centrally.

Council Houses

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many council houses were built in Wales in the years 1979, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information is given in the table:

Local authority completions

	Number
1979	3,010
1987	810
1988	793
1989	566
1990	551
1991	[1]388

[1] Provisional.
Source: Welsh Office local authority returns.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the annual amount spent on council house maintenance in Wales in the years, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information is available only by financial year. Figures for the financial years 1987-88 to 1990-91 are given in the following table. They have been derived from local authorities housing revenue account subsidy claim forms. Expenditure in 1990-91 is the sum of maintenance expenditure charged either to the housing revenue account or the housing repairs account.

Council house maintenance expenditure in Wales

	£ million
1987-88	[1]91·8
1988-89	94·6
1989-90	106·5
1990-91	[2]110·1

[1] Includes an estimate for those authorities who did not submit subsidy claim forms.
[2] Provisional.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current *(a)* male and *(b)* total employment percentage in (i) Wales and (ii) the area covered by the valleys initiative in each month of 1987 and 1991.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Estimated percentages of the work force in employment, including those on work-related government training programmes, are given in the following table:

	1987		*1991*		*1992*	
(i) Wales	*Male*	*Total*	*Male*	*Total*	*Male*	*Total*
January	83·0	85·7	89·6	92·2	86·7	90·1
February	83·4	86·2	89·2	91·9	—	—
March	83·9	86·6	88·9	91·7	—	—
April	84·1	86·8	88·6	91·5	—	—
May	84·7	87·3	88·6	91·5	—	—
June	85·3	87·8	88·6	91·5	—	—
July	85·3	87·7	88·1	91·1	—	—
August	85·5	87·9	88·0	90·9	—	—
September	85·1	87·5	87·8	90·8	—	—
October	85·7	88·0	87·9	91·0	—	—
November	85·8	88·3	87·6	90·8	—	—
December	85·8	88·2	87·2	90·5	—	—

	1987		*1991*		*1992*	
(ii) Valleys	*Male*	*Total*	*Male*	*Total*	*Male*	*Total*
January	77·9	81·8	84·2	88·6	80·6	86·0
February	78·3	82·3	83·8	88·4	—	—
March	78·9	82·9	83·0	87·8	—	—
April	78·9	82·9	82·4	87·3	—	—
May	79·3	83·2	82·3	87·3	—	—
June	80·0	83·8	82·4	87·4	—	—
July	80·1	83·8	81·7	86·8	—	—
August	80·4	84·1	81·7	86·7	—	—
September	79·9	83·6	81·5	86·7	—	—
October	80·8	84·5	81·9	87·1	—	—
November	81·2	85·0	81·7	86·9	—	—
December	81·2	84·9	81·3	86·6	—	—

TRANSPORT

Shipping North Sea

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vessels operating in support of the North sea oil industry, United Kingdom sector, are under *(a)* the British flag and *(b)* foreign flags, by country.

Mr. McLoughlin: On 31 January 1992, there were 147 vessels operating as supply, anchor handling and other support vessels and, in addition, 176 standby vessels in the United Kingdom sector of the North sea in support of the oil industry. The countries of registration and the numbers involved were:

Support Vessels	*Number*
United Kingdom	86
Norway	22
Denmark	10
Netherlands	8
Germany	3
Others	18

Standby Vessels	*Number*
United Kingdom	149
Isle of man	9
Bermuda	2
Norway	2
Netherlands	1
Cayman Islands	4
Bahamas	4
United States of America	5

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will delay publication of the White Paper on railway privatisation until after the general election.

Mr. Freeman: We will publish our White Paper as soon as we are ready.

Flight Safety

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of co-ordination of research effort in matters of flight safety.

Mr. McLoughlin: In the United Kingdom the Civil Aviation Authority is responsible for co-ordinating research on civil flight safety. The machinery for this co-ordination is being reviewed, so as both to increase managerial accountability within the authority and to obtain additional advice from outside.

Research on flight safety in Europe is co-ordinated as appropriate through the joint aviation authorities or Eurocontrol. I expect to see more extensive co-ordination of research in this field in the years ahead.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage increase in tolls on the Severn bridge will be introduced in April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: *[holding answer 20 February 1992]:* The tolls which will apply from 26 April, as provided for under the Severn Bridges Act 1992, involve the following increases over the current tolls at the Severn bridge, based on the cost of a return trip over the bridge:

	Per cent.
Cars and motor caravans	40
Light vans and minibuses	180
Buses and goods vehicles	110

These increases are a reflection of the cost of building the second Severn bridge, which will provide a substantial and eagerly awaited improvement in the road links between south Wales and England.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Civil Service (Scotland)

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list how many non-Scottish Office civil service jobs there are in Scotland by Government Department and location of employment.

Mr. Maples: The number of non-industrial civil servants employed in Scotland—other than in the Scottish Office—at 1 October 1991 totalled 37,926. Table 1 gives a detailed breakdown by Department and by Scottish region.

In addition, another 6,355 industrial civil servants were employed in Scotland—other than in the Scottish Office—at 1 April 1991 (the latest available information). Table 2 gives a departmental analysis. No breakdown by Scottish region is available.

Table 1
Non-industrial staff in post in Scotland by Department (including Agencies) and Scottish region at 1 October 1991 (excluding Scottish Office)

Department	*Highland*	*Grampian*	*Tayside*	*Fife*	*Lothian*	*Borders*	*Central*	*Strathclyde*	*Dumfries*	*Islands*	*Total*
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	8	93	11	—	31	6	5	19	6	2	181
Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal	35	60	72	43	305	9	47	584	28	8	1,191
Customs and Excise	48	250	116	34	333	11	70	790	17	28	1,697
Defence	80	272	227	1,467	362	1	158	4,032	54	90	6,743
Employment Department Group	205	284	340	219	1,140	52	184	2,348	97	52	4,921
Energy	—	8	—	—	2	—	—	70	—	—	80
Environment	—	—	—	—	47	—	—	21	—	—	68
PSA Service	16	70	22	46	453	—	5	254	14	13	893
General Register Office, Scotland	—	—	—	—	303	—	—	21	—	—	324
Home Office	—	6	—	3	7	—	—	219	—	—	235
Inland Revenue	159	243	195	137	1,942	45	97	3,752	72	—	6,642
Lord Chancellor's Department	—	—	—	—	17	—	—	36	—	114	167
National Savings	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,562	—	—	2,562
Ordnance Survey	10	7	7	8	24	3	5	33	6	—	103
OPCS	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	108	—	—	108
ODA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	555	—	—	555
Registers of Scotland	—	—	—	—	1,112	—	—	—	—	—	1,112
Scottish Courts Administration	—	—	—	—	—	—	161	—	—	—	161
Scottish Courts Service	26	51	46	36	218	6	34	369	23	6	815
Scottish Record Office	—	—	—	—	117	—	—	—	—	—	117
Social Security	174	389	427	334	1,465	74	315	4,325	133	62	7,698

Department	Highland	Grampian	Tayside	Fife	Lothian	Borders	Central	Strathclyde	Dumfries	Islands	Total
Trade and Industry	—	1	2	—	47	—	—	323	—	—	373
Transport	32	94	32	26	197	5	5	219	7	43	660
Other	—	—	4	2	490	—	3	21	—	—	520
TOTAL	793	1,828	1,501	2,355	8,612	212	1,089	20,661	457	418	37,926

Note: Figures are on a full-time equivalent basis, i.e. part-timers are counted as half units.

Source: MANDATE/Departments.

Table 2
Industrial staff in post in Scotland by Department (including agencies) at 1 April 1991 (excluding Scottish Office)

Department	Number
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	13
Defence	5,432
Employment Department Group	5
HMSO	72
Ordnance Survey	4
Social Security	3
Trade and Industry	74
Transport	704
HM Treasury (inc. Forward/CISCO)	35
Others	13
TOTAL	6,355

Note: Figures are on a full time equivalent basis, ie part-timers are counted as half units.

Source: Civil Service Statistics 1991 Edition.

Income Tax

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the loss of revenue from income tax at *(a)* the standard rate and *(b)* the higher rate, of allowing husbands and wives to aggregate their incomes for tax purposes and divide by two; and whether he will publish a table showing the loss by range of total incomes and the number of incomes in each case.

Mr. Maude: Approximate figures at 1991-92 levels of income are given in the table:

Total income £ per year	Number of taxpaying married couples (million)	Revenue loss in a full year £ million
0 to 10,000	0·9	400
10,000 to 15,000	2·2	1,700
15,000 to 20,000	2·2	1,800
20,000 to 40,000	2·7	1,900
30,000 to 40,000	1·0	800
40,000 to 50,000	0·4	600
Over 50,000	0·6	1,600
TOTAL	10·0	8,800

These estimates do not allow for any behavioural effect that might result from such a change in the tax system.

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the value of income tax paid by Scottish-based taxpayers.

Mr. Maude: The amount of income tax liability for residents of Scotland was estimated to be £3·49 billion for 1988-89, the latest available year.

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Scottish-based income tax payers' affairs are handled by tax offices in England and Wales.

Mr. Maude: Of 1·9 million single people and married men liable to income tax in 1988-89 and resident in Scotland, about 400,000 had their income tax affairs handled by tax offices in England and Wales. The corresponding information about married women under independent taxation is not yet available.

Taxation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing for 1970, 1974, 1979 and 1990-91, the amount collected in (i) *(a)* employees and *(b)* employers national insurance contributions, (ii) income tax at the (c) standard and *(d)* higher rates, (iii) value added tax and (iv) other indirect taxes.

Mr. Maude: The information requested is given in the table.

£ billion

	1970-71	1974-75	1978-79	1990-91
(i) NICs [1]				
employers	1·4	3·1	6·2	20·4
employees	1·3	2·4	4·1	14·9
(ii) Income tax [2]				
total tax liability	6·2	11·8	20·3	59·4
total liability at higher rate	—	1·5	1·8	12·5
total liability at excess over standard rate	0·3	0·6	0·8	4·7
(iii) VAT [3]	—	2·8	5·2	32·5
(iv) Other indirect taxes [4]	5·2	4·9	9·0	24·0

[1] Excludes national insurance surcharge (levied from 1977-78 until 1984-85)
[2] Until 1972-73, Surtax, a deferred instalment of income tax charged at rates additional to the standard rate, was payable.
[3] VAT excluding that refunded on central government and local authority expenditure.
[4] Other customs and excise duties. Includes purchase tax in 1970-71.

European Community Fraud

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made towards implementing recommendations contained in the European Court of Auditors' report in regard to fraud.

Mr. Maude: The Community took an important step to combat fraud against the Community budget by the adoption, in 1989, of a 45-point action programme, which covers areas of irregularity, particularly in agriculture, identified in the reports of the court. The Commission produces, for consideration by the Council and European Parliament, an annual report on the fight against fraud which details the progress made. The action taken includes steps by the Commission to revise its operating systems, to simplify existing legislation, and to consider new measures to prevent irregularities in the implementation of the budget. The Commission is currently considering the measures needed to bring the 45-point action programme up to date, on the basis of proposals from member states including the United Kingdom.

The further important recent development was the agreement at Maastricht that the treaty should clearly place responsibility on member states to counter fraud affecting the Community's finances. The Maastricht treaty also seeks to strengthen procedures to counter fraud and irregularities by requiring the Court of Auditors to provide a statement of assurance on the reliability of the Community's accounts; by making explicit the Commission's responsibility for sound financial management; and by giving enhanced powers to the European Parliament to examine the Commission on the basis of the court's observations including action it has taken in response. The Government will also continue their active role in the Council, pressing to ensure that the scope for fraud and irregularities continues to be narrowed.

Mortgage Tax Relief

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost to the Exchequer of increasing the maximum limit for mortgage tax relief to *(a)* £40,000, *(b)* £50,000 and *(c)* £60,000.

Mr. Maude: The estimated costs at 1991-92 levels of increasing the ceiling on mortgage interest tax relief are shown in the table.

Ceiling on mortgage interest tax relief	*Cost of increasing the ceiling on mortgage interest tax relief for 1991-92*[1]
£	*£ billion*
40,000	0·7
50,000	1·1
60,000	1·3

[1] The estimates are based on the distribution of existing mortgages and therefore exclude behavioural effects which might result from the change and could be substantial.

Privatisation

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *336*, if he will indicate which shares for each of the concerns privatised since 1979 are currently held by *(a)* individual shareholders, *(b)* pension funds, *(c)* domestic companies, *(d)* overseas companies and *(e)* others.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 20 February 1992]:* This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Overseas Private Investment

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current level of total overseas private investment; and what was the level in 1979 expressed at current prices.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 20 February 1992]:* The estimated level of United Kingdom residents' identified direct investment (at book values) and portfolio investment (at market values), excluding public corporations' direct investment overseas, was £312 billion at the end of 1990. The corresponding figure at the end of 1979 was £44 billion (at end-1979 values) or £74 billion (at end-1990 values). Figures for 1991 are not yet available.

Public Service Pay

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to amend the principle whereby thr rates of civil and public servants are a matter of public record.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 20 February 1992]:* There are no plans to change arrangements whereby the Treasury makes publicly available pay scales, maxima and minima for the main civil service grades.

The pay of individual officers will continue to be confidential to the individual, apart from in the case of a small number of senior staff whose pay is a matter of public interest.

Policy for other parts of the public sector is a matter for the organisations concerned.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Dentistry

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the dates on which the equipment recommended in the Poswillo report for resuscitation and monitoring of patients in connection with the provision of general anaesthetic in dentistry was installed in each community clinic in the area of the southern health and social services board; and if he will list those community clinics which have not yet received the equipment.

Mr. Hanley: The community clinics in the Southern health and social services board area which are equipped to the standards recommended in the Poswillo report are as follows:

Clinic
Thomas Street, Dungannon
Dobbin Street, Armagh
St. Luke's Hospital, Armagh
John Mitchell Place, Newry

Each of these clinics met the recommended standards prior to 1990. As to the other clinics in the Southern board, equipment for the Banbridge clinic is currently being ordered, and the Brownlow health centre will be equipped to Poswillo standards when it reopens in the summer.

Cardiac Surgery

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to make provision for a fifth cardiac surgeon at the Royal Victoria hospital, at Belfast.

Mr. Hanley: The Eastern health and social services board is responsible for the management of the cardiac surgery unit at the Royal Victoria hospital. A fourth cardiac surgeon, who is a locum, has recently been appointed and will take up post on 1 May 1992 for a period of one year, with a review and possible extension at the end of that period. I am not aware of any plans to make provision for a fifth cardiac surgeon at the Royal Victoria hospital but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that a very high priority will continue to be accorded to the specialty.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to reduce the waiting lists for cardiac surgery.

Mr. Hanley: The Government have provided significant additional capital and revenue funding to enable more cardiac operations to be carried out at the Royal Victoria hospital. An extension to the cardiac recovery unit costing £1·5 million was completed in October 1991, and funds of £300,000 were made available for a fourth cardiac surgeon and supporting team. A locum surgeon has been appointed and will take up post on 1 May 1992. In addition, health and social services boards are purchasing cardiac operations for their resident populations from other parts of the United Kingdom. It is the Government's intention in respect of the cardiac surgery waiting list to honour, at the earliest possible date, the guarantee in the citizens charter that no one should have to wait for more than two years for a cardiac operation.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated value of savings in public expenditure and the estimated additional cost to employers in Northern Ireland to date of changes in statutory sick pay regulations since 1990.

Mr. Hanley: The estimated value of savings to date is £5 million and the estimated additional cost to employers is correspondingly £5 million.

Public Appointments

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Republic of Ireland is now involved in the matter of public appointments in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Irish Government may put forward views and proposals on the role and composition of bodies appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland or by Departments subject to his direction and control, as envisaged by article 6 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Labour Statistics

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how man Protestants are employed by the establishment in the *(a)* Newry and Mourne council area and *(b)* Strabane whose employees are over 90 per cent. Protestant.

Mr. Needham: Monitoring returns submitted to the Fair Employment Commission in 1991 show that there are 118 Protestants employed in such concerns in the Newry and Mourne council area. There are no concerns in the Strabane council area whose employees are over 90 per cent. Protestant.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Roman Catholics are employed by the establishments in *(a)* the Newry and Mourne council area, *(b)* the Omagh council area and *(c)* Strabane, whose employees are over 90 per cent. Roman Catholic.

Mr. Needham: The information is:

	Number
Newry and Mourne council area	1,971
Omagh council area	156
Strabane council area	319

The information is derived from the monitoring returns submitted to the Fair Employment Commission in 1991.

Distilleries (Financial Support)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the value of financial support given in each of the past five years to *(a)* Bushmills distillery and *(b)* Bass Ireland brewery.

Mr. Needham: The value of financial support given to the Bushmills distillery and the Bass Ireland brewery in each of the past five years is as follows:

Year	*Bushmills distillery* £	*Bass Ireland* £
1987-88	96,151·98	195,885·63
1988-89	47,093·55	9,113·50
1989-90	9,678·60	Nil
1990-91	150,160·00	Nil
1991-92	169,176·27	Nil
TOTAL	472,260·40	204,999·13

Killough Conservation Area

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in relation to the enhancement strategy for the Killough conservation area.

Mr. Needham: A contract has been let to replace the existing concrete bollards and further upgrade the Castle street car park in Killough.

Roads

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total expenditure for *(a)* road improvements, *(b)* road repairs on (i) A category, (ii) B category, (iii) C category and (iv) unclassified roadways in each section of the Department of the Environment (NI) roads service in each of the last five years.

Mr. Needham: The information available is as follows:

DOE (NI) Roads service division	Road improvements £ million Class A and B roads	Road improvements £ million Class C and unclassified roads	Road repairs £ million Class A and B roads	Road repairs £ million Class C and unclassified roads
1986-87				
Ballymena	1·33	0·82	2·22	4·23
Belfast	4·51	0·52	2·27	6·43
Coleraine	2·43	0·82	3·41	5·98
Craigavon	2·80	0·41	3·03	5·34
Downpatrick	1·72	1·38	3·25	6·02
Omagh	1·43	0·56	3·96	5·03
1987-88				
Ballymena	1·70	0·78	2·48	3·98
Belfast	4·07	0·65	2·21	7·10
Coleraine	2·79	0·37	2·16	3·90
Craigavon	2·63	0·40	2·66	5·58
Downpatrick	2·04	1·02	3·50	5·88
Omagh	1·45	0·80	3·21	5·74
1988-89				
Ballymena	3·81	0·41	2·49	4·03
Belfast	2·74	0·73	2·42	7·41
Coleraine	1·73	0·48	3·04	3·78
Craigavon	2·47	0·51	3·70	5·20
Downpatrick	3·63	1·34	3·84	5·82
Omagh	1·22	0·86	4·41	5·71
1989-90				
Ballymena	2·84	0·46	3·81	3·72
Belfast	7·52	0·83	3·78	7·60
Coleraine	2·03	0·75	3·60	4·03
Craigavon	1·78	0·91	4·45	5·08
Downpatrick	2·32	1·26	5·19	5·62
Omagh	3·97	0·77	5·46	6·00
1990-91				
Ballymena	2·65	0·36	4·27	3·93
Belfast	5·99	0·97	3·70	7·79
Coleraine	1·70	0·89	4·12	4·23
Craigavon	2·37	0·89	5·24	5·45
Downpatrick	3·65	0·75	6·02	5·34
Omagh	4·56	0·55	6·35	6·30

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total length of *(a)* A category, *(b)* B category, *(c)* C category and *(d)* unclassified roadways in each section of the Department of the Environment (NI) roads service.

Mr. Needham: The information is as follows:

Department of the Environment (NI) roads service division

	Class 1 (A category) Kms	Class 2 (B category) Kms	Class 3 (C category) Kms	Unclassified Kms
Ballymena	401·4	446·8	663·5	1,764·1
Belfast	157·2	122·0	114·4	1,287·4
Coleraine	374·9	522·1	550·3	1,832·8
Craigavon	445·5	564·7	1,030·3	3,034·5
Downpatrick	419·3	330·7	597·8	1,822·5
Omagh	525·0	888·6	1,762·0	4,507·7

Rural Development

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total projected expenditure on *(a)* rural development division of the Department of Agriculture, *(b)* Rural Development Council for Northern Ireland, *(c)* interdepartmental committee on rural development and *(d)* other rural development initiatives in the financial years 1990-91, 1991-92, 1992-93, 1993-94 and 1994-95.

Mr. Hanley: Projected expenditure on the Government's rural development initiative is as follows:

Rural Development Division of the Department of Agriculture

The DANI Rural Development Division has been established progressively since February 1991. Running costs for the year to 31 March 1992 are estimated at £145,000. Projected running costs for 1992-93 are £263,000. Subject to pay and prices increases the running costs for subsequent years are projected at a similar level.

Northern Ireland Rural Development Council

The Northern Ireland rural development council was established on 31 July 1991. Expenditure by the council in 1991-92 is estimated at £396,000, including both running costs and assistance to community-based rural development groups. Financial allocations to the rural development council for 1992-93 and subsequent years have not yet been finalised pending the outcome of the council's deliberations on its strategic plan and budgetary requirements.

Inter-Departmental Committee on Rural Development

The costs of the committee have been absorbed within existing provision.

Other Rural Development Initiatives

1990-91—£234,000, financed in part by the EC, was incurred on rural development pilot projects.

1991-92—Expenditure on rural development projects is estimated at £248,000, financed in part by the EC.

Allocations for 1992-93 and subsequent years have not yet been finalised and will depend on, among other things, the outcome of the rural development council's strategy and budget discussions as well as the pattern of expenditure on the NI LEADER programme—for which £4 million is available from EC and national resources—and on any rural development projects under the community development measure of the EC INTERREG initiative.

Housing Executive (Replacement Grant)

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give full details of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's replacement grant scheme.

Mr. Needham: I have been informed by the chairman of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, which is responsible for the administration of the house renovation grants scheme, that details of the scheme are as follows.

Replacement grants are available in respect of those dwellings where on technical and cost grounds, replacement is a more effective solution than improvement. The executive will decide through technical surveys of the dwelling and through value for money assessment—economic assessment—which dwellings will be suitable for a replacement option. In general, dwellings which are suitable subjects for improvement at reasonable costs will not be considered for replacement.

Replacement will predominantly be aimed at rural properties which are considered necessary and viable to meet the housing requirements of the rural population. Such dwellings are likely to be occupied or have recently been occupied. Where vacant, the executive will have to be satisfied that replacement will be specifically required to meet the current housing needs of the applicants or members of his or her household as sole residence for the foreseeable future. Alternatively, such dwellings will be required to be available for letting.

All new dwellings provided under this scheme will be required to meet standards set down by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the normal statutory approvals—planning, building control, etc.—will be required.

The replacement grant will initially operate within the terms of the existing improvement grants legislation, and grant will be limited to the maximum grants applicable to the current improvement grants scheme.

The details are as follows:

1. £9,450 at the 75 per cent. grants level.
2. £11,340 at the 90 per cent. (financial hardship) grants level.

In cases where the higher eligible expense level applies for the first time, service provision in excess of £1,500 the maximum grant levels will be increased as follows:

1. £12,450 (75 per cent.)
2. £14,940 (90 per cent.)

To qualify as being in financial hardship, applicants must be receiving housing benefit or rate rebate, income support or family credit continually for at least six months before making a formal application for grant or before the executive gives formal grant approval.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when decisions will be issued in respect of applications for replacement grants submitted in the past six months.

Mr. Needham: I have been informed by the chairman of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, which is responsible for the administration of the house renovation grants scheme, that no formal applications for replacement grants have been submitted in the past six months. I am also informed that to date the executive has only received preliminary inquiries and that decisions on these will be issued in individual cases where replacement is determined to be the appropriate course of action. Formal applications supported by the required documentation will then have to be submitted for processing and approval.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many applications for replacement grants have been received by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; and in how many cases a decision has been issued;

(2) how many replacement grants have been awarded by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Mr. Needham: I have been informed by the chairman of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, which is responsible for the administration of the house renovation grants scheme, that no completed formal applications have yet been received and as a result no replacement grants have yet been awarded.

Water Charges

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many requests for a reduction in water charges were received by the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) in each year since 1985, in each water board area; and in how many cases reductions were agreed.

Mr. Needham: Information on the number of requests for a reduction in water charges is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The numbers of reductions granted are as follows:

Financial Year	*Division*				
	North	*South*	*East*	*West*	*Total*
1985-86	117	210	85	225	637
1986-87	267	262	132	232	893
1987-88	254	227	116	199	796
1988-89	214	177	133	150	674
1989-90	199	227	126	172	724
1990-91	115	122	112	126	475
[1]1991-92	196	246	112	180	734
TOTAL	1,362	1,471	816	1,284	4,933

[1] To 31 January 1992.

Police Traffic Operations

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* police traffic officers and *(b)* civilians working in police traffic departments there were in each year since 1981.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 14 February 1992]:* The information requested is as follows:

Year	Police Officers	Civilians
1981	346	23
1982	351	23
1983	365	23
1984	353	25
1985	395	27
1986	363	33
1987	361	33
1988	316	31
1989	301	31
1990	320	30
1991	319	30

Traffic Offences

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many motorists have been *(a)* charged with and *(b)* convicted of (i) reckless driving, (ii) illegal use of bus lanes, (iii) failure to accord precedence at zebra and pedestrain crossings, (iv) speeding, (v) failure to stop at a red or amber traffic light and (vi) drunken driving, in each year since 1981.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 14 February 1991]:* The available information is set out in the table:

	Reckless driving	Failing to stop at pelican and zebra crossing	Speeding	Breach of traffic sign	Drink, driving offences
1981					
Proceeded against	409	—	4,883	532	3,165
Convicted	377	—	4,840	517	3,108
1982					
Proceeded against	411	—	3,841	528	3,071
Convicted	363	—	3,834	512	2,997
1983					
Proceeded against	423	—	3,461	686	3,315
Convicted	386	—	3,437	664	3,228
1984					
Proceeded against	454	—	5,039	749	2,971
Convicted	418	—	5,005	659	2,913
1985					
Proceeded against	500	—	5,287	873	3,143
Convicted	468	—	5,234	840	3,083
1986					
Proceeded against	386	nil	4,726	741	3,042
Convicted	354	nil	4,673	722	2,985
1987					
Proceeded against	478	1	7,296	780	3,060
Convicted	456	1	7,229	758	2,989
1988					
Proceeded against	431	5	8,304	830	2,818
Convicted	392	5	8,199	801	2,750
1989					
Proceeded against	469	3	7,344	722	2,499
Convicted	420	3	7,268	688	2,432
1990					
Proceeded against	542	8	7,414	799	2,796
Convicted	480	8	7,312	752	2,705

Notes:
1. Prior to 1986, offences relating to pelican and zebra crossings are included in the figures for breach of traffic signs.
2. Offences relating to bus lanes and traffic lights are included in the figures for breach of traffic signs.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many motorists have been *(a)* charged with and *(b)* convicted of assault against (i) pedestrians, (ii) cyclists and (iii) other motorists, in each year since 1981.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 14 February 1992]:* The information requested is not available from existing records.

Traffic Statistics

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cyclists have been *(a)* injured and *(b)* killed in road traffic accidents in each year since 1981.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 14 February 1992]:* The available information is as follows:

Year	Cyclists injured	Cyclists killed
1981	299	7
1982	368	9
1983	432	14
1984	480	13
1985	365	10
1986	318	10
1987	374	12
1988	397	4
1989	366	9
1990	388	11

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the annual figures for (i) road deaths and (ii) injuries for each year since 1981, including the number of *(a)* children and *(b)* adults who have been hit by cars on or near pedestrian crossings.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 14 February 1992]:* The available information is set out in the table:

Year	Total killed	Pedestrian adults killed on or near pedestrian crossings	Pedestrian children killed on or near pedestrian crossings	Total injured	Pedestrian adults injured on or near pedestrian crossings	Pedestrian children injured on or near pedestrian crossings
1981	223	—	—	7,557	—	—
1982	216	—	—	7,923	—	—
1983	173	—	—	7,540	—	—
1984	189	—	—	8,561	—	—
1985	177	—	—	8,460	—	—
1986	236	10	2	9,206	155	90
1987	214	10	0	9,722	129	89
1988	178	8	2	10,789	176	90
1989	181	4	1	11,430	150	85
1990	185	2	1	11,576	147	89

Note: Prior to 1986 the numbers of pedestrian adults and children injured or killed on or near pedestrian crossings are not separately identifiable.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mr. Abdul Rauf

Mr. Madden: To ask the Attorney-General whom the appellate authorities notified when an appeal by Mr. Abdul Rauf, TH/19383/89, against refusal to grant a visa to visit the United Kingdom was upheld; when the notification was sent; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The immigration appellate authorities (IAA) notified the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service at Leeds and the Home Office on 26 September 1990 of the adjudicator's decision to allow Mr. Abdul Rauf's appeal.

The IAA's records indicate that the correct procedures were used to notify the parties of the outcome of this appeal.

Mortgage Repossessions

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the numbers of mortgage repossession actions entered and orders made in the Coventry and Warwickshire area by county court division in each year since 1987.

The Attorney-General: The table gives the total number of mortgage possession actions entered and orders made in the Coventry county court and each of the three county courts in Warwickshire for each year since 1987. These figures do not indicate how many houses have been repossessed through the courts as not all of the orders made will have resulted in the issue and execution of warrants of possession. At this stage the 1991 figures are provisional and therefore liable to revision in the future.

Mortgage possession actions

Court	Year	Actions entered	Orders made
Coventry	1987	560	385
	1988	454	536
	1989	668	500
	1990	1,213	930
	1991	1,241	1,328
Warwick	1987	178	70
	1988	172	129
	1989	228	126
	1990	310	217
	1991	332	321
Stratford-upon-Avon	1987	67	41
	1988	43	30
	1989	75	47
	1990	122	68
	1991	206	143
Nuneaton	1987	484	353
	1988	343	220
	1989	560	327
	1990	848	708
	1991	998	772

Admission Appeals

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Attorney-General how many applications against refusal of admission made in Dhaka are awaiting determination by the Immigration Appeal Tribunal in the United Kingdom.

The Attorney-General: The information requested is not readily available because the Immigration Appeal Tribunal does not record the statistics sought by the hon. Member. In October 1991 there were 14 applications against refusal of admission made in Bangladesh awaiting determination by the appeal tribunal in the United Kingdom.

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the quality of service performance indicators adopted by each of his and the Lord Chancellor's Departments executive agencies since their establishment and separately identify those quality of service performance indicators already operative prior to agency status.

The Attorney-General: The quality of service indicators operating in the Land Registry, the only executive agency of the Lord Chancellor's Department (the Law Officers' Departments have none), are:

(a) speed of processing applications;
(b) accuracy of the work produced;
(c) number of complaints received.

Prior to becoming an agency, standards of service existed for the first two aspects but not in respect of the number of complaints received.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the new forms of alternative working patterns introduced into each of his and the Lord Chancellor's Departments executive agencies since their establishment and provide a break-down by grade of the numbers of staff taking up each new working pattern for each agency.

The Attorney-General: The Land Registry, as the only executive agency of the Lord Chancellor's Department (the Law Officers' Departments have none) provides a wide range of alternative working patterns which were all introduced before it became an executive agency.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Attorney-General how much was spent on events and publicity surrounding the launch of each of his and the Lord Chancellor's Departments executive agencies; and whether the cost was borne by the parent department or the new agency.

The Attorney-General: The cost of events and publicity surrounding the launch of the Land Registry as an executive agency (the only executive agency of the Lord Chancellor's Department—the Law Officers' Departments have none) in July 1990 was £23,063. This included "open" days which enabled members of the public and others who use the registry's services to visit and see the work of the agency. The whole cost was met by the Land Registry.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Attorney-General how many staff were in post on the date that each of the executive agencies in the Lord Chancellor's and Law Officers' Departments were established; and how many are in post now, in each case.

The Attorney-General: The Land Registry, as the only executive agency of the Lord Chancellor's Department (the Law Officers' Departments have none), became an executive agency on 2 July 1990, at which time there were 10,698 staff employed. The equivalent figure at 1 February 1992 was 9,637 staff.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Attorney-General what is the maximum salary payable to the chief executive of each of his and the Lord Chancellor's Departments executive agencies, including performance-related element, and the length of time of the chief executive's contract in each case.

The Attorney-General: The current maximum salary payable to the chief executive of the Land Registry, the only executive agency of the Lord Chancellor's Department (the Law Officers' Departments have none), including a performance-related element, is £66,100. The contract is for 3¼ years—1 January 1991 to 31 March 1994. It is renewable.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list those new facilities for staff including nurseries and health care schemes which have been introduced in each of his and the Lord Chancellor's Departments executive agencies since their establishment.

The Attorney-General: Since becoming an executive agency in July 1990, the Land Registry, as the only executive agency of the Lord Chancellor's Department (the Law Officers' Departments have none), has established or provided places in eight local holiday play schemes and two local nurseries. This is in addition to six pre-existing holiday play schemes. Six new ventures are currently being evaluated.

Both before and after becoming an agency, the registry has pursued a range of health care measures, such as workplace policies on smoking, cervical cancer screening, and alcohol-related problems; giving publicity to national health campaigns; promoting healthy eating in staff restaurants; and providing awareness counselling and support through a readily accessible welfare service.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Attorney-General what was the first degree obtained by the chief executive of each of his and the Lord Chancellor's Departments executive agencies; and from which university or polytechnic it was awarded.

The Attorney-General: The chief executive of the Land Registry, the only executive agency of the Lord Chancellor's Department (the Law Officers' Departments have none) has not pursued a course of study which would lead to a university or polytechnic degree.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list each of his and the Lord Chancellor's Departments executive agencies that operates a group bonus scheme and state the cash amount per person awarded in the last year for which figures were available and the conditions attached to its award.

The Attorney-General: The Land Registry, as the only executive agency of the Lord Chancellor's Department (the Law Officers' Departments have none), does not operate a group bonus scheme.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the post, grade and maximum salary payable, including performance-related elements, in each case where appointments have been made to his and the Lord Chancellor's Departments executive agencies at grade 7 or above, since their establishment.

The Attorney-General: The following appointments at grade 7 level and above have been made to the Land Registry since becoming an executive agency in July 1990 (the only executive agency of the Lord Chancellor's Department—the Law Officers' Departments have none):

Post	*Grade*	*Number*	*Maximum pay £*
Chief Land Registrar (Chief Executive)	2	1	66,100
Solicitor to Land Registry	3	1	57,000
Director of Finance	5	1	47,921

Post	Grade	Number	Maximum pay £
Land Registrars	5	1	53,740
Deputy Establishment Officer	6	1	42,724
Controller of Operational Development	6	1	42,724
Head of Development Computer Services	6	1	41,120
Area Managers	6	4	41,120
Senior Assistant Land Registrars	6	4	46,122
Office Manager York	7	1	33,175
Head of Personnel Division 1	7	1	34,667
Head of Internal Audit	7	1	34,667
Principal, Legal Practice	7	1	34,667
Management Accountant	7	1	34,667
Finance Officer	7	1	34,667
Deputy Area Managers	7	7	33,175
Computer Services Divisional Managers	7	2	33,175
Assistant Land Registrars	7	19	37,755

Most of the appointments have been occasioned by retirements and the effect of two restructuring exercises, one based on a Treasury staff inspection report and the other on a review by management consultants.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Attorney-General when the last annual report for each of his and the Lord Chancellor's Departments executive agencies were published; and when the next ones are due.

The Attorney-General: The annual report for 1990-91 of the Land Registry, the only executive agency of the Lord Chancellor's Department (the Law Officers' Departments have none) was published in October 1991. The report for 1991-92 is expected to be available in August of this year.

Legal Aid

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Attorney-General whether he has any plans to amend the Civil Legal Aid (General) Regulation 1989 to enable charitable or voluntary organisations which are subject to the special limitations imposed by rule 3 of the solicitors' practice rules to obtain payments on account from the Legal Aid Board; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor has no proposals to amend the Legal Aid Regulations with regard to payments to charitable or voluntary organisations. Any solicitor acting for an assisted person under a legal aid certificate is entitled to apply for payments on account in accordance with the Civil Legal Aid (General) Regulations 1989.

HEALTH

Hospital and Community Health Services

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give for the northern region and its constituent areas and districts, for each year from 1978-79 onwards, current expenditure on the hospital and community health services *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* adjusted for NHS pay and prices.

Mr. Dorrell: Tables I and II show the information requested for the northern region.

Both tables show expenditure in cash and in input volume terms. Changes in input volumes are, however, an inadequate guide to the level of service the NHS can be expected to achieve, since they do not reflect the continuing success of the NHS in increasing the efficiency with which it uses its resources. The third column of each table therefore shows the relevant expenditure figures in real terms, ie adjusted by the GDP deflator.

Table I

Northern region—revenue expenditure on hospital and community health services (HCHS)

	1978-79		
	cash	*input volume terms*	*real terms*
	£000	*£000*	*£000*
Northern RHA	9,583	29,371	24,295
Cleveland	46,448	142,362	117,759
Cumbria	36,569	112,085	92,714
Durham	46,474	142,443	117,826
Northumberland	26,511	81,256	67,213
Gateshead	13,457	41,246	34,118
Newcastle on Tyne	53,699	164,586	136,142
North Tyneside	9,029	27,674	22,891
South Tyneside	9,434	28,917	23,919
Sunderland	26,202	80,310	66,431
Northern Region Total	277,406	850,250	703,308

	1979-80		
	cash	*input volume terms*	*real terms*
	£000	*£000*	*£000*
Northern RHA	12,363	31,452	26,864
Cleveland	57,350	145,899	124,616
Cumbria	43,755	111,312	95,075
Durham	56,071	142,645	121,837
Northumberland	31,819	80,949	69,140
Gateshead	16,436	41,812	35,713
Newcastle on Tyne	66,041	168,008	143,500
North Tyneside	10,965	27,895	23,826
South Tyneside	11,307	28,766	24,570
Sunderland	31,889	81,125	69,291
Northern Region Total	337,996	859,863	734,433

	1980-81		
	Cash	*Input volume terms*	*Real terms*
	£000	*£000*	*£000*
Northern RHA	15,519	30,835	28,497
Cleveland	74,296	147,627	136,430
Cumbria	57,163	113,582	104,968
Durham	73,147	145,343	134,320
Northumberland	41,055	81,576	75,389
Gateshead	21,173	42,072	38,881
Newcastle upon Tyne	84,200	167,305	154,616
North Tyneside	14,209	28,234	26,093
South Tyneside	14,814	29,435	27,202
Sunderland	41,449	82,359	76,113
Northern Region Total	437,025	868,368	802,508

	1981-82		
	Cash	*Input volume terms*	*Real terms*
	£000	*£000*	*£000*
Northern RHA	17,042	31,307	28,537
Cleveland	81,897	150,446	137,137
Cumbria	62,835	115,429	105,218
Durham	80,908	148,627	135,480
Northumberland	45,503	83,588	76,194
Gateshead	23,263	42,735	38,954
Newcastle upon Tyne	94,708	173,978	158,588
North Tyneside	15,748	28,929	26,370
South Tyneside	16,293	29,930	27,282
Sunderland	44,473	81,696	74,469
Northern Region Total	482,670	886,665	808,231

Table II

Northern Region—revenue expenditure on hospital and community health services (HCHS)

	1982-83		
	cash	*input volume terms*	*real terms*
	£000	*£000*	*£000*
Northern RHA	18,694	32,247	29,222
Hartlepool	14,038	24,216	21,945
North Tees	22,658	39,085	35,419
South Tees	53,150	91,684	83,084
East Cumbria	29,143	50,272	45,557
South Cumbria	19,301	33,295	30,172
West Cumbria	19,048	32,858	29,776
Darlington	22,746	39,237	35,557
Durham	26,540	45,782	41,488
North West Durham	13,552	23,378	21,185
South West Durham	24,001	41,401	37,518
Northumberland	48,677	83,968	76,092
Gateshead	24,973	43,078	39,038
Newcastle	101,394	174,905	158,499
North Tyneside	16,984	29,298	26,550
South Tyneside	17,999	31,049	28,136
Sunderland	47,938	82,694	74,937
Northern Region Total	520,838	898,446	814,174

	1983-84		
	cash	*input volume terms*	*real terms*
	£000	*£000*	*£000*
Northern RHA	19,861	32,591	29,672
Hartlepool	14,679	24,089	21,931
North Tees	24,310	39,893	36,319
South Tees	55,879	91,698	83,483
East Cumbria	30,842	50,611	46,077
South Cumbria	20,703	33,974	30,930
West Cumbria	20,544	33,713	30,693
Darlington	24,038	39,446	35,913
Durham	27,338	44,861	40,843
North West Durham	14,180	23,269	21,185
South West Durham	25,938	42,565	38,752

	1983-84 cash £000	1983-84 input volume terms £000	1983-84 real terms £000
Northumberland	51,771	84,956	77,345
Gateshead	26,495	43,478	39,584
Newcastle	108,216	177,583	161,675
North Tyneside	18,708	30,700	27,950
South Tyneside	19,061	31,279	28,477
Sunderland	51,432	84,400	76,840
Northern Region Total	553,996	909,107	827,670

	1984-85 cash £000	1984-85 input volume terms £000	1984-85 real terms £000
Northern RHA	20,834	32,313	29,644
Hartlepool	15,679	24,318	22,309
North Tees	25,451	39,474	36,214
South Tees	58,141	90,177	82,729
East Cumbria	32,460	50,346	46,188
South Cumbria	22,894	35,509	32,576
West Cumbria	21,682	33,629	30,852
Darlington	25,625	39,745	36,462
Durham	28,834	44,721	41,028
North West Durham	15,018	23,293	21,369
South West Durham	27,584	42,783	39,249
Northumberland	55,168	85,566	78,499
Gateshead	28,308	43,906	40,280
Newcastle	114,164	177,068	162,444
North Tyneside	20,961	32,511	29,826
South Tyneside	20,048	31,095	28,527
Sunderland	54,000	83,755	76,837
Northern Region Total	586,852	910,207	835,031

	1985-86 cash £000	1985-86 input volume terms £000	1985-86 real terms £000
Northern RHA	22,432	33,064	30,249
Hartlepool	16,980	25,029	22,898
North Tees	26,751	39,430	36,073
South Tees	60,693	89,461	81,844
East Cumbria	34,282	50,532	46,229
South Cumbria	24,433	36,015	32,948
West Cumbria	22,998	33,899	31,013
Darlington	26,771	39,460	36,101
Durham	29,999	44,218	40,453
North West Durham	15,713	23,161	21,189
South West Durham	29,209	43,054	39,388
Northumberland	57,893	85,334	78,068
Gateshead	29,795	43,918	40,179
Newcastle	121,728	179,427	164,150
North Tyneside	21,950	32,354	29,600
South Tyneside	20,879	30,776	28,155
Sunderland	57,580	84,873	77,647
Northern Region Total	620,085	914,005	836,184

	1986-87 cash £000	1986-87 input volume terms £000	1986-87 real terms £000
Northern RHA	22,735	31,352	29,681
Hartlepool	18,391	25,361	24,009
North Tees	28,890	39,840	37,716
South Tees	65,963	90,963	86,115
East Cumbria	37,270	51,396	48,656
South Cumbria	26,348	36,334	34,397
West Cumbria	24,492	33,775	31,975
Darlington	28,983	39,968	37,838
Durham	32,344	44,602	42,225
North West Durham	16,776	23,134	21,901
South West Durham	31,230	43,066	40,770
Northumberland	61,546	84,872	80,348
Gateshead	32,434	44,727	42,343
Newcastle	129,754	178,931	169,394
North Tyneside	23,792	32,809	31,060
South Tyneside	22,519	31,054	29,399
Sunderland	61,197	84,391	79,893
Northern Region Total	664,666	916,574	867,721

	1987-88 cash £000	1987-88 input volume terms £000	1987-88 real terms £000
Northern RHA	20,978	26,663	25,973
Hartlepool	20,888	26,549	25,862
North Tees	31,895	40,538	39,489
South Tees	73,203	93,040	90,632
East Cumbria	40,719	51,754	50,414
South Cumbria	29,120	37,011	36,053
West Cumbria	26,753	34,004	33,123
Darlington	31,418	39,932	38,899
Durham	35,005	44,491	43,340
North West Durham	18,585	23,621	23,010
South West Durham	34,224	43,499	42,373
Northumberland	66,239	84,190	82,011
Gateshead	34,789	44,216	43,072
Newcastle	145,364	184,758	179,976
North Tyneside	25,922	32,947	32,094
South Tyneside	25,147	31,962	31,135
Sunderland	66,176	84,109	81,932
Northern Region Total	726,424	923,285	899,386

	1988-89 cash £000	1988-89 input volume terms £000	1988-89 real terms £000
Northern RHA	22,455	25,823	25,940
Hartlepool	23,529	27,059	27,181
North Tees	34,304	39,450	39,628
South Tees	81,915	94,202	94,628
East Cumbria	45,167	51,942	52,177
South Cumbria	31,978	36,774	36,941
West Cumbria	29,434	33,849	34,003
Darlington	34,595	39,785	39,964
Durham	37,827	43,501	43,698
North West Durham	20,946	24,088	24,197
South West Durham	38,069	43,780	43,978
Northumberland	73,107	84,072	84,453
Gateshead	37,737	43,398	43,594
Newcastle	160,885	185,018	185,855
North Tyneside	29,409	33,820	33,973
South Tyneside	27,745	31,907	32,051
Sunderland	73,559	84,593	84,976
Northern Region Total	802,662	923,061	927,235

	1989-90 cash £000	1989-90 input volume terms £000	1989-90 real terms £000
Northern RHA	25,813	27,724	28,002
Hartlepool	26,858	28,846	29,136
North Tees	37,472	40,245	40,649
South Tees	86,059	92,428	93,357
East Cumbria	47,772	51,307	51,823
South Cumbria	35,090	37,687	38,066
West Cumbria	31,506	33,838	34,178
Darlington	37,285	40,045	40,447
Durham	37,981	40,791	41,201
North West Durham	22,496	24,161	24,404
South West Durham	40,337	43,322	43,758
Northumberland	77,989	83,760	84,602
Gateshead	40,496	43,492	43,930
Newcastle	173,702	186,556	188,432
North Tyneside	31,906	34,267	34,611
South Tyneside	30,098	32,325	32,650
Sunderland	79,543	85,429	86,288
Northern Region Total	862,403	926,221	935,535

1990-91

	Cash £000
Northern regional health authority	27,479
Hartlepool	28,589
North Tees	39,248
South Tees	93,727
East Cumbria	52,050
South Cumbria	38,647
West Cumbria	33,314
Darlington	39,145
Durham	40,698
North West Durham	23,812
South West Durham	43,169
Northumberland	82,563
Gateshead	44,040
Newcastle	190,898
North Tyneside	34,800
South Tyneside	33,384
Sunderland	85,835
NORTHERN REGION TOTAL	931,400

Notes to the tables:

1. Expenditure on the HCHS covers services directly managed and/or accounted for by the health authorities (at the relevant time) including hospital, community health, patient transport (i.e. ambulance), blood transfusion and other services.
2. The figures are derived from the annual accounts of the regional health authority (RHA) and the area health authorities (district health authorities from 1 April 1982) comprising the Northern region. 1990-91 figures are as yet subject to audit.
3. The volume input terms column of each table shows the cash figures for the relevant year expressed at 1990-91 prices after adjustment by the HCHS pay and prices index.
4. The real terms column of each table shows the cash figures for the relevant year expressed in 1990-91 prices after adjustment by the GDP deflator.

District Nurses

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of whole-time equivalent district nurses employed by each regional health authority in England in 1976, 1981, 1986 and 1991; and if he will list the number of people aged *(a)* 65 to 74 years, *(b)* 75 to 84 years and *(c)* 85 years and above in each of those regional health authorities in each of those years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is shown in the tables. Information has been provided for 1990, the latest available year.

National health service district nurses as at 30 September each year England by regional health authorities[1,2]

Whole-time equivalent[3]

Region	*1976	*1981	1986	1990
Northern RHA	930	1,040	1,160	1,160
Yorkshire RHA	900	1,100	1,110	1,170
Trent RHA	1,230	1,390	1,520	1,610
East Anglia RHA	430	550	590	560
North West Thames RHA	840	900	990	1,080
North East Thames RHA	850	990	1,010	1,180
South East Thames RHA	1,020	1,240	1,240	1,210
South West Thames RHA	870	970	970	970
Wessex RHA	630	800	910	900
Oxford RHA	600	740	690	700
South Western RHA	740	930	970	1,050
West Midlands RHA	1,270	1,600	1,570	1,610
Mersey RHA	650	760	800	830
North Western RHA	1,300	1,530	1,640	1,730
London Post Graduate Special Health Authorities	—	—	20	—
England Total	12,270	14,520	15,190	15,740

Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual Census of NHS Non-Medical Manpower.

Notes:

[1] Excludes senior nurses grade 1 to 8 and district nurse students. Includes district nurses, district nurse practical work teachers, registered and enrolled nurses assisting district nurses, dual posts (DN/MID) and bank district nurses.

[2] District nurses are defined by occupation code, not by payscale, and the former is known to be less accurate than the latter. Apparent changes in the figures can be due to changes in coding accuracy by health authorities rather than actual changes in numbers of district nurses.

[3] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalent.

[4] Not adjusted for the reduction in nurses working hours during 1980-81. (From 40 to 37·5 per week).

Estimated resident population at mid 1976 by specific age groups

Regions	Ages 65 to 74	Ages 75 to 84	Ages 85+
Northern	280,900	124,600	26,500
Yorkshire	335,500	153,900	35,000
Trent	403,800	180,200	39,400
East Anglia	174,000	82,000	19,200
North West Thames	290,200	130,100	32,200
North East Thames	345,900	161,000	39,400
South East Thames	369,400	183,600	46,200
South West Thames	287,700	142,700	35,000
Wessex	263,400	127,200	30,800
Oxford	169,300	77,600	19,800
South Western	317,400	152,400	36,500
West Midlands	426,300	183,000	39,800
Mersey	214,800	95,900	22,400
North Western	395,100	177,500	36,900
England Total of above	4,273,700	1,971,700	459,100

Estimated resident population at mid 1981 by specific age groups

Regions	Ages 65-74	Ages 75-84	Ages 85+
Northern	280,600	141,400	28,700
Yorkshire	336,200	175,900	38,300
Trent	417,500	208,200	44,400
East Anglia	186,400	95,800	22,300
North West Thames	295,800	148,500	35,100
North East Thames	343,900	177,900	41,400
South East Thames	365,700	201,700	50,000
South West Thames	290,600	160,600	41,200
Wessex	277,100	148,900	35,900

Regions	Ages 65-74	Ages 75-84	Ages 85+
Oxford	179,600	91,300	22,100
South Western	324,900	175,800	41,800
West Midlands	444,700	215,000	44,400
Mersey	218,000	109,100	24,200
North Western	385,900	199,400	41,500
England Total of above	4,346,900	2,249,500	511,300

Estimated resident population at mid 1986 by specific age groups

Regions	Ages 65 to 74	Ages 75 to 84	Ages 85+
Northern	275,850	153,972	34,078
Yorkshire	318,712	190,983	45,814
Trent	409,487	234,720	52,845
East Anglia	184,677	111,166	26,778
North West Thames	280,787	167,878	41,446
North East Thames	324,917	196,496	49,125
South East Thames	345,563	219,139	57,300
South West Thames	271,871	176,387	47,134
Wessex	272,400	169,716	43,431
Oxford	183,335	105,317	25,674
South Western	316,377	197,864	50,795
West Midlands	443,004	244,492	52,874
Mersey	208,230	120,169	28,093
North Western	355,377	212,740	47,896
England Total of above	4,190,587	2,501,039	603,283

Estimated resident population at mid 1990 by specific age groups

Regions	Ages 65 to 74	Ages 75 to 84	Ages 85+
Northern	277,958	161,846	42,403
Yorkshire	318,247	197,925	56,402
Trent	413,706	250,066	66,169
East Anglia	192,253	120,299	33,157
North West Thames	274,194	175,423	51,287
North East Thames	315,389	203,596	60,283
South East Thames	337,186	224,073	67,441
South West Thames	265,750	181,378	55,349
Wessex	276,733	180,540	52,715
Oxford	193,123	115,630	30,965
South Western	319,189	209,108	62,499
West Midlands	450,453	263,646	67,158
Mersey	207,747	125,358	34,691
North Western	345,647	215,792	59,017
England Total of above	4,187,575	2,624,680	739,536

Fresh Fruit

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 6 February, *Official Report*, column *275*, if he will specify the various considerations that led the 1989 Committee on Medical Aspects of Food panel on dietary sugars and human disease to classify fresh fruit, as eaten by humans, as intrinsic sugars.

Mr. Dorrell: The panel found that the physical location of sugars influences their availability for bacterial metabolism in the mouth and the readiness with which they are absorbed after ingestion. For that reason they considered it would be helpful to distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic sugars. They defined intrinsic sugars as being those which form an integral part of certain unprocessed foodstuffs, and which are enclosed in the cell of the food. The sugars present naturally in fresh fruit and vegetables (mainly fructose, glucose and sucrose) fall within that definition.

Tobacco Advertising

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what position he will adopt concerning the proposed ban on tobacco advertising throughout the European Community when it comes before the Council of Ministers in May; in reaching his decision, what weight he will attach to the opinion of the European Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We have noted the opinion of the European Parliament. When the proposal comes to the Health Council, the Government will maintain their position that the proposed directive is unnecessary for the completion of the single market.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department collects individual case histories of patients who have been waiting for over two years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No.

Child Care

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he intends to apply the Disqualification for Caring for Children Regulations 1991 to the local authority sector.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have no intention of doing so. Although the Disqualification for Caring for Children Regulations do not apply to the local authority sector, volume 8 of the Children Act regulations and guidance series advises that local authorities should have regard to the regulations when considering the appointment of staff to any children's services run by the local authority, and when assessing people's suitability to work as childminders or foster parents employed by a local authority.

In addition, volumes 2—"Family Support, Day Care and Educational Provision for Young Children", 3—"Family Placements" and 4—"Residential Care" in the Children Act series contain clear guidance on the requirement for local authorities to undertake a thorough assessment of the suitability of people who wish to work with children in any service run by the local authority. Compliance will ensure that equivalent measures exist for safeguarding the welfare of children cared for in the local authority sector as those in the private and voluntary sectors.

General Whitley Council

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about his decision to revoke the appeals procedure for national health service employees, General Whitley Council, section 32.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 19 February at columns *206-7*.

National Health Service Expenditure

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish table 3 of Cm 1913 adjusted for input unit costs.

Mr. Dorrell *[pursuant to his reply, 18 February 1992 112-14.]:* I regret that there was an error in the table. The last two columns of the table were incorrectly calculated. A revised table is as follows.

Expenditure figures as they appear in table 3 of Cm 1913 adjusted for changes in input unit costs and by the GDP deflator (all at 1990-91 prices)

£ million

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
NHS hospital, community health, family health (cash limited) and related services							
Current expenditure							
Adjusted for change in input unit cost							
Gross	14,977	15,251	15,311	15,329	16,081	[1]—	[1]—
Net	14,540	14,818	14,876	14,873	15,590	[1]—	[1]—
Adjusted by the GDP deflator							
Gross	14,178	14,857	15,377	15,483	16,081	17,405	18,380
Net	13,764	14,434	14,940	15,022	15,590	16,950	17,967
Capital expenditure							
Adjusted for change in input unit cost							
Gross	1,423	1,425	1,450	1,591	1,555	[1]—	[1]—
Net	1,221	1,166	1,110	1,332	1,377	[1]—	[1]—
Adjusted by the GDP deflator							
Gross	1,372	1,369	1,376	1,548	1,555	1,536	1,368
Net	1,178	1,121	1,054	1,296	1,377	1,338	1,189
NHS family health services (non cash limited) current/total expenditure							
Adjusted for change in input unit cost							
Gross	5,146	5,323	5,489	5,470	5,304	[1]—	[1]—
Net	4,593	4,763	4,891	4,807	4,690	[1]—	[1]—
Adjusted by the GDP deflator							
Gross	4,740	4,976	5,261	5,219	5,304	5,293	5,524
Net	4,231	4,452	4,688	4,587	4,690	4,673	4,888
Total health services							
Current expenditure							
Adjusted for change in input unit cost							
Gross	20,777	21,223	21,400	21,436	22,017	[1]—	[1]—
Net	19,774	20,218	20,364	20,317	20,889	[1]—	[1]—
Adjusted by the GDP deflator							
Gross	19,524	20,446	21,216	21,314	22,017	23,414	24,641
Net	18,581	19,477	20,189	20,201	20,889	22,310	23,559
Capital expenditure							
Adjusted for change in input unit cost							
Gross	1,474	1,454	1,487	1,621	1,603	[1]—	[1]—
Net	1,273	1,193	1,121	1,361	1,425	[1]—	[1]—
Adjusted by the GDP deflator							
Gross	1,422	1,398	1,411	1,577	1,603	1,686	1,529
Net	1,227	1,147	1,064	1,325	1,425	1,423	1,350
Total expenditure							
Adjusted for change in input unit cost							
Gross	22,271	22,696	22,908	23,064	23,620	[1]—	[1]—
Net	21,061	21,429	21,517	21,688	22,314	[1]—	[1]—
Adjusted by the GDP deflator							
Gross	20,945	21,843	22,628	22,891	23,620	25,100	26,170
Net	19,808	20,624	21,253	21,526	22,314	23,734	24,909

[1] Estimates are not made for changes in input unit cost until the financial year has ended.

ENVIRONMENT

Fair Rents

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that fair rents for regulated tenants in private properties are based on the same valuation as that made for council tax.

Mr. Yeo: None. Fair rents are not based on the capital values of property with vacant possession, but are determined according to the rules set out in section 70 of the Rent Act 1977. The valuation bands to be used for council tax purposes are not suitable for setting rents. We have no plans to change the way in which fair rents are set for regulated tenancies.

Planning Advice

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now bring forward regulations under section 150 of the Local Government and Housing

Act 1989 to enable local authorities to recover their costs in providing pre-planning application advice and other related services.

Mr. Yeo: The Department encourages local authorities to discuss development proposals with applicants before a planning application is submitted. The implications of the recent judgment of the House of Lords that local authorities may not charge for this service are being studied.

Ozone Layer

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps the Government are proposing to take to ensure the eradication of the production of ozone-depleting chemicals at the earliest possible date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The Government are committed to phasing out CFCs, halons, carbon tetrachloride and methyl chloroform within the United Kingdom by the end of 1995 at the latest. Both United Kingdom producers will cease production of these substances no later than that date. Last week, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment wrote to the president of the EC Environment Council, urging the Community to adopt the strongest possible position in the negotiations towards the revision of the Montreal protocol, which will begin in April.

Development Plans

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to replace the Town and Country Planning (Development Plans) (England) Direction 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: We have today sent to all local planning authorities in England a copy of the Town and Country Planning Development Plans (England) Direction 1992 which comes into effect on 28 February. This replaces the 1981 direction.

The new direction will require authorities to advertise in a local newspaper all applications not in accordance with the development plan and which they do not propose to refuse. This gives the local community the opportunity to comment on and object to such applications; and to ask my right hon. Friend to call them in.

Authorities must also report to my right hon. Friend all such applications which are for major development or which otherwise threaten important policies in the plan. This will enable my right hon. Friend to be aware of significant divergences from the development plan and to consider whether he wishes to call in such applications for his determination. It remains his policy that in general applications will be called in only where planning issues of more than local importance are involved.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is issuing a similar direction to Welsh local planning authorities.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Defence Sales

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will now make it his practice to provide information about the levels of Export Credits Guarantee Department insurance cover for individual overseas defence sales.

Mr. Sainsbury: No. It has been the policy of successive Governments not to publish details of ECGD cover for individual sales contracts unless all the commercial parties agree.

Advanced Technology Programme

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on what plans he has to announce any further assistance under the advanced technology programme.

Mr. Lilley: Yes. I have approved a £15 million collaborative research advanced technology programme for tracked-transport systems aimed at stimulating R and D expenditure to the end of the century.

This initiative will help United Kingdom firms to gain a greater share of new opportunities in tracked-transport arising out of increasing public concern for the environment and recent advances in new technology.

There will be close co-operation between my Department and the Department of Transport and the programme will be fully in line with the priority given to the railways by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport in his statement on 28 May 1991.

The opening of the channel fixed link and the completion of the single European market including the move to freer public purchasing will present further opportunities.

Hong Kong (Visit)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether, on his visit to Hong Kong in November 1989, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), took part in party political activities in addition to official duties.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 13 February 1992]:* I understand that the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) did not visit Hong Kong in November 1989.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Julie Ward

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise with the Attorney General of Kenya during his visit to London the matter of Julie Ward's killing in that country.

Mrs. Chalker: Two Kenyan rangers have been accused of the murder of Julie Ward, and the case is currently sub-judice. It would not therefore be appropriate to raise any substantive points about the case at this stage. The high commission is in touch with the Attorney-General's office in Nairobi about the arrangements for the trial, which we shall be following with the closest attention.

Commonwealth of Independent States

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visits have been made by Overseas Development Agency and Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff to the Commonwealth of Independent States in connection with aid matters in the last year; and at what approximate cost.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Since 21 February 1991 there have been 14 visits to the former Soviet Union in connection with aid matters involving a total of 19 ODA and FCO staff, some of whom have visited more than once. The approximate cost—airfares and local expenses not met by the host authorities—was £63,000.

Francisco Javier Perez Egert

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will deny diplomatic status to Francisco Javier Perez Egert, recently appointed as military attaché to the Chilean embassy in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Francisco Javier Perez Egert has not been notified to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as a member of staff of the Chilean embassy and has not been accepted or received as such.

DEFENCE

Beagle Packs

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements he has to license beagle packs to use land owned, operated or leased by his Department; and if he will list the beagle packs that have such licences.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Two beagle packs have licences to hunt on Ministry of Defence land. These are the Glyn Celyn beagles and the Catterick beagles. The licences to these packs are negotiated by the Defence land agent taking into account the particular requirements of the Defence establishment concerned.

Five other beagle packs have access to Ministry of Defence land under other arrangements.

Nuclear Weapons Safety Committee

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the terms of reference of the Nuclear Weapons Safety Committee.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is not our practice to make these terms of reference public, but I will consider further whether I could help the hon. Gentleman.

HMS Revenge

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date HMS Revenge started its current commission.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: HMS Revenge began its present commission in January 1983.

Civilian Employees

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the number of civilians employed by his Department for each of the years 1980 to 1992.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information requested is as follows:

	Number
1980	218,026
1981	208,761
1982	197,491
1983	190,334
1984	181,183
1985	174,077
1986	169,462
1987	164,002
1988	143,394
1989	141,317
1990	141,372
1991	140,199
1992	140,024

The figures are based on the total number of MOD civilians in post at 1 April each year with the exception of that for 1992 which relates to 1 January.

Industrial Workers

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people were employed in the industrial sector by his Department at each location for 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Alan Clark: The available information is as follows:

Ministry of Defence industrial civil servants

Full-time equivalents

Area	*1 July 1987*	*1 July 1988*	*1 July 1989*	*1 July 1990*	*1 July 1991*
South East	18,896·0	17,449·0	16,093·5	15,661·0	15,379·0
East Anglia	1,092·5	1,087·5	1,022·0	997·0	934·5
South West	10,711·5	10,286·0	10,002·5	9,748·0	9,456·5
West Midlands	4,432·0	4,249·0	4,177·0	4,145·5	4,021·5
East Midlands	1,986·0	1,789·0	1,614·0	1,428·5	1,599·5
Yorkshire/Humberside	2,355·5	2,185·0	2,013·0	2,043·5	1,801·5
North West	636·0	599·0	576·5	567·5	552·5
Northern	1,605·0	1,582·5	1,566·0	1,569·0	1,506·5
Wales	3,465·0	3,130·5	3,102·5	3,030·0	3,030·5
Scotland	5,929·0	5,852·0	5,713·5	5,581·5	5,393·0
Northern Ireland	1,761·0	1,785·0	1,818·0	1,798·0	1,748·5
Inner London	566·0	479·0	444·5	485·0	483·0
Intermediate London	1,025·0	863·5	822·5	713·5	748·0
Outer London	1,678·0	1,506·5	1,406·0	1,412·5	1,241·5
Elsewhere in United Kingdom	1·0	1·0	1·0	2·0	2·0

Area	1 July 1987	1 July 1988	1 July 1989	1 July 1990	1 July 1991
At sea and RFA	1,343·0	1,512·0	1,565·0	1,552·0	1,685·0
Overseas	10·0	10·0	11·0	23·0	24·0
Not allocated	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	1·0
MOD Total	57,492·5	54,366·5	51,948·5	50,757·5	49,608·0

Flight Safety

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of co-ordination of research effort in matters of flight safety.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence co-operates closely with the civil aviation community and international aviation authorities on matters of flight safety, including research, and will continue to do so in the future.

HMS Green Rover

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the sale of HMS Green Rover to Indonesia.

Mr. Alan Clark: It has been the consistent policy of successive Governments not to discuss particulars of defence contracts with other countries since these are matters of commercial confidentiality.

RAF Greenham Common

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the hon. Member for Newbury can expect answers to his letter of 13 December, to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Lord Arran, and to his letters of 20 December and 3 February to the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, relating to RAF Greenham Common.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write very shortly to my hon. Friend in response to his letters on 16 and 20 December and 3 February.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Written Answers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the three most expensive answers for which calculations have already been made to parliamentary written questions since 1987.

Mr. MacGregor: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

SCOTLAND

Food Hygiene

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to publish the new Scottish food hygiene regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Formal consultations were held last year on proposals to introduce statutory temperature controls for certain foodstuffs. In the light of the responses received, we have more recently had discussions with representatives of trade interests and with local authorities who would be responsible for enforcement. We are considering the issues which have been raised, and will announce our conclusions in due course.

Bus Services

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what response he has given to schemes prepared by Scottish bus companies supported by regional councils following the publication of "Buses Mean Business"; and whether the Scottish schemes will be funded on a similar basis to English ones.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I support the aims of the "Buses Mean business" campaign in Scotland. For this reason, regional and islands councils have been invited to treat bus priority measures as a special objective in their financial plans on which capital allocations are based. The arrangements for central Government support for local authority transport expenditure in Scotland are different from those in England.

Mental Hospitals

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the change in the number of beds in NHS mental hospitals in every year since 1977 in absolute and percentage terms; and the number of day centre places opened in the same period.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The available information on psychiatric beds is shown in the table. Information on numbers of day patient places opened is not centrally available.

National Health Service hospitals in Scotland—psychiatric specialties average available staffed beds; absolute and percentage change from previous year; years ending 31 March

	Change from previous year	
	Absolute	Percentage
1977	−522	−2·8
1978	−343	−1·9
1979	−46	−0·3
1980	−364	−2·1
1981	−215	−1·3
1982	−188	−1·1
1983	−196	−1·2
1984	−125	−0·8
1985	19	0·1
1986	−266	−1·6
1987	−377	−2·3
1988	−312	−2·0
1989	−535	−3·5
1990	−566	−3·8
1991	−479	−3·3

Blood Transfusion Service

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the arrangements made for *(a)* the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service and *(b)* the Plasma Fractionation Centre in connection with the transitional arrangements covering removal of Crown immunity status consequent upon the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Following the removal of Crown immunity status from health bodies under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service (SNBTS) and the protein fractionation centre (PFC) were required to apply to the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) for pharmaceutical manufacturer's licence and product licences in order to comply with the legislation. However, the granting of licences by the MCA is an extensive process and in order to ensure continuity of clinical and pharmaceutical services special provisions were made under the Act for transitional arrangements to allow the SNBTS and PFC to continue to operate. Under these arrangements the SNBTS was required to submit all new licence applications and resubmit existing licences held by 31 March 1991. This has been completed.

The PFC has been granted a manufacturing licence and also a number of product licences have been obtained. A group of product licences previously held under the arrangements prior to the removal of Crown immunity are still being processed by the MCA but it is expected that new licences will be obtained shortly.

Constituencies

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the six highest and six lowest numbers of electors in parliamentary constituencies in Scotland; and what is the average constituency electorate in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The latest information available relates to the 1991 register of electors, when the average electorate was 54,369, and is as follows:

Highest parliamentary constituency electorates

	Number
Gordon	78,438
Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber	68,848
East Lothian	67,223
Ayr	66,126
Kincardine and Deeside	65,660
Perth and Kinross	65,135

Lowest parliamentary constituency electorates

	Number
Western Isles	23,073
Caithness and Sutherland	31,120
Orkney and Shetland	31,355
Glasgow, Provan	37,838
Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale	39,608
Glasgow, Central	42,270

Traffic, Dairsie

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the results of all traffic surveys his Department has carried out at Dairsie in the last 10 years for which information is available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Classified traffic counts are carried out at a location on the A91 west of Dairsie at six-yearly intervals. The results of those carried out on the last two counts were:

14 October 1980 5,782 vehicles from 7 am to 7 pm.
14 October 1986 6,438 vehicles from 7 am to 7 pm.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what factors influenced his decision in 1991 not to build a bypass round Dairsie.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The resources available for road building schemes are limited and therefore choices have to be made between the numerous schemes competing for the available funding. Before a feasibility study is carried out, it is necessary to ensure that the benefits arising from a scheme would justify the capital expenditure. In the case of a bypass of Dairsie such an evaluation indicated that this criterion could not be met.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what considerations have caused him to conclude that a controlled pedestrian crossing at Dairsie is not justified.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Counts of pedestrian and vehicular movements on the A91 within Dairsie indicated that the combined movements were less than one quarter of the figure required to justify the provision of a pedestrian crossing.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will institute traffic-calming measures to reduce the speed of vehicles travelling through Dairsie.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Measures to reduce the speed of traffic through Dairsie have already been introduced and further measures are planned for later this year.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will instruct a fresh survey of traffic at Dairsie to determine whether a bypass is justified.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Classified traffic counts are undertaken on a six-yearly cycle at predetermined census points throughout the United Kingdom.

One such census point is located just west of Dairsie and is representative of the traffic flows within the village. The next count at this location is planned for October this year from which it will be possible to determine whether further consideration of a bypass of Dairsie is justified.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received in support of a controlled pedestrian crossing at Dairsie; and from whom.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A total of 64 individual letters have been received from residents of Dairsie supporting the installation of a pelican crossing. In addition two petitions containing in total 266 signatures, including 38 from primary school children, have been received. Some of the signatories to the petitions also wrote individually and are therefore included in both totals.

Pedestrian Crossings

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the criteria which his Department uses when deciding whether a controlled pedestrian crossing is justified.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The criteria for establishing pedestrian crossings are contained in "Technical Memorandum SH 7/87", published by the Scottish Office in February 1987. A copy of this memorandum has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number and locations of the controlled pedestrian crossings which his Department has approved in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Fife and *(c)* north-east Fife in the last 10 years for which information is available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of pelican crossings currently on trunk roads which have been authorised by the Secretary of State are given in the table. Some of these crossings will have been authorised longer ago than 10 years. Other crossings, originally authorised by the Secretary of State on trunk roads, are not included in the table because the roads concerned are no longer classified as trunk roads.

Pelican crossings on trunk roads

	Number
Fife	
North East Fife	3
Elsewhere	3
Borders	5
Central	3
Dumfries and Galloway	2
Grampian	8
Highland	2
Lothian	2
Strathclyde	20
Tayside	0
All Scotland	48

Bypasses

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many bypasses his Department has funded in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Fife and *(c)* north-east Fife in the last 10 years for which information is available; and what sums have been spent in doing so.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The figures requested are as follows:

(a) 38 bypasses at a cost of £373 million,
(b) 1 bypass at a cost of £3·4 million,
(c) none.

These figures exclude the construction of the £40 million east Fife regional road which effectively bypassed many towns and villages in central Fife.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the criteria his Department uses in determining whether a bypass should be built.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Many factors are used in determining the need for a bypass and the relative priority of these varies depending on local circumstances. Criteria include: traffic flow and composition such as the percentages of heavy goods vehicles and the proportion of through traffic; safety considerations for vehicles and pedestrians; environmental factors such as noise benefits to residential or commercial properties; the feasibility and economic viability of a bypass route; and the relationship to local and national development plans and transport strategy.

Bankruptcies

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each year for which figures are available the names of the 20 trustees in Scotland who received the largest aggregate total sum for work carried out under the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985 and for each of the top 20 the sum received in each year; if he will state in respect of each year, for cases where the final outcome is known, the fees paid to trustees in sequestrations which have exceeded 50 per cent. of the total debt; in how many cases the block fee system was *(a)* applied or *(b)* disapplied in each year; and in how many cases each year since 1985 there has been any dividend paid to unsecured ordinary creditors.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* (i) The 20 insolvency practitioners who received the largest aggregate payments and the amounts paid are shown in the table:

Name of trustee	*Firm/Office*	*Payments made from public funds* £
1987		
R. S. MacGregor	Pannell Kerr Forster, Edinburgh	35,477·11
G. I. Rankin	Deloitte Haskins and Sells, Glasgow	18,668·98
N. J. McNeill	BDO Binder Hamlyn, Glasgow	12,968·09
P. C. Taylor	Deloitte Haskins and Sells, Edinburgh	10,924·72
R. B. M. Graham	Cork Gully, Edinburgh	10,916·44
D. I. Turner	Ernst and Young, Glasgow	10,852·22
D. J. Watt	Cork Gully, Edinburgh	8,124·95
O. I. Balfour	Deloitte Haskins and Sells, Aberdeen	7,008·66
G. Ritchie	Ernst and Young, Edinburgh	7,998·81
A. S. Gray	Peat Marwick McLintock, Glasgow	6,679·63
J. D. Laurie	Cork Gully, Edinburgh	6,347·80
R. E. Blin	Pannell Kerr Forster, Glasgow	5,430·22
J. C. Pringle	J. C. Pringle and Co., Inverness	4,782·46
A. C. Thomson	Thomson Cooper and Co., Dunfermline	3,865·47
C. A. F. Hastings	Hastings and Co., Glasgow	3,753·75
R. C. Wallace	Wallace and Co., Hamilton	3,162·50
B. A. Jackson	Pannell Kerr Forster, Glasgow	3,008·55
A. I. Armstrong	Grainger and Co., Glasgow	2,901·95
P. L. Stewart	Peat Marwick McLintock, Glasgow	2,569·60
P. J. Campbell	Pannell Kerr Forster, Aberdeen	22,555·36
1988		
R. S. MacGregor	Pannell Kerr Forster, Edinburgh	169,801·05
O. L. Balfour	Deloitte Haskins and Sells, Aberdeen	101,178·60
D. B. Jackson	Douglas Laing and Jackson, Glasgow	82,602·91
R. B. Graham	Cork Gully, Edinburgh	73,565·60
C. A. F. Hastings	C. A. F. Hastings and Co, Glasgow	69,256·07
J. C. J. Readman	Ernst and Young, Glasgow	53,376·04
P. C. Taylor	Deloitte Haskins and Sells, Edinburgh	47,813·63
J. D. Laurie	Cork Gully, Edinburgh	47,113·15
G. I. Rankin	Deloitte Haskins and Sells, Glasgow	42,943·90
F. Blin	Cork Gully, Glasgow	33,764·26
A. S. Gray	Peat Marwick McLintock, Glasgow	27,448·21

Name of trustee	Firm/Office	Payments made from public funds £
B. A. Jackson	Pannell Kerr Forster, Glasgow	24,433·13
A. Amoore	Peat Marwick McLintock, Aberdeen	23,406·52
R. A. Johnson	Cork Gully, Glasgow	22,204·69
N. Robinson	Kidsons Impey, Glasgow	21,699·32
K. A. Ross	Kenneth Ross and Sharkey, Glasgow	21,468·72
W. Hecht	F. L. Walker and Co, Glasgow	19,886·25
T. Dyer	Scott Oswald and Co, Dundee	18,914·64
T. P. C. Taylor	Spicer Oppenheim, Glasgow	18,518·03
P. J. Campbell	Pannell Kerr Forster, Aberdeen	18,094·42
1989		
R. S. MacGregor	Pannell Kerr Forster, Edinburgh	940,219·67
P. J. Campbell	Pannell Kerr Forster, Aberdeen	363,305·17
J. C. J. Readman	Ernst and Young, Glasgow	267,649·68
B. A. Jackson	Pannell Kerr Forster, Glasgow	267,371·11
O. L. Balfour	Cork Gully, Aberdeen	253,747·66
P. C. Taylor	Cork Gully, Edinburgh	200,849·57
R. B. M. Graham	Cork Gully, Edinburgh	169,909·08
C. A. F. Hastings	Hastings and Co., Glasgow	162,639·78
W. T. M. Cleghorn	Cork Gully, Edinburgh	145,561·02
G. I. Rankin	Cork Gully, Glasgow	137,441·84
A. S. Gray	Peat Marwick McLintock, Glasgow	123,481·09
D. B. Jackson	Douglas Laing and Jackson, Glasgow	118,239·72
K. A. Ross	Kenneth Ross and Sharkey, Glasgow	110,450·79
J. D. Laurie	Cork Gully, Edinburgh	110,306·12
R. E. Blin	Pannell Kerr Forster, Glasgow	102,468·64
T. Dyer	Scott Oswald and Co., Dundee	77,962·79
G. Ritchie	Ernst and Young, Edinburgh	61,618·00
A. Amoore	Peat Marwick McLintock, Aberdeen	52,675·43
N. Robinson	Kidsons Impey, Glasgow	47,535·77
W. Hecht	F. L. Walker and Co., Glasgow	38,486·43
1990		
R. S. MacGregor	Pannell Kerr Forster, Edinburgh	1,649.996·80
N. Robinson	Kidson Impey, Glasgow	664,389·06
J. C. J. Readman	Ernst and Young, Glasgow	651,547·69
P. J. Campbell	Pannell Kerr Forster, Aberdeen	454,322·46
B. A. Jackson	Pannell Kerr Forster, Glasgow	436,609·84
C. A. F. Hastings	Hastings and Co., Glasgow	401,615·46
N. J. McNeill	BDO Binder Hamlyn, Glasgow	245,562·04
O. L. Balfouar	Cork Gully, Aberdeen	211,310·41
P. C. Taylor	Cork Gully, Edinburgh	204,758·15
F. Blin	Cork Gully, Glasgow	181,825·24
A. W. O'Boyle	F. L. Walker, Glasgow	170,686·55
G. Ritchie	Ernst and Young, Edinburgh	163,361·81
R. E. Blin	Pannell Kerr Forster, Glasgow	150,245·16
G. I. Rankin	Cork Gully, Glasgow	147,425·87
W. T. M. Cleghorn	Cork Gully, Edinburgh	139,235·54
N. M. Sharp	Ernst and Young, Aberdeen	136,767·95
R. B. M. Graham	Cork Gully, Edinburgh	124,492·96
W. Hecht	F. L. Walker, Glasgow	120,201·78
D. B. Jackson	Douglas Laing and Jackson, Glasgow	103,547·39
D. H. Beedie	Ernst and Young, Dundee	100,676·45
1991		
R. S. MacGregor	Pannell Kerr Forster, Edinburgh	2,217,113·44
N. Robinson	Kindsons Impey, Glasgow	1,232,632·10
J. C. J. Readman	Ernst and Young, Glasgow	1,217,222·00
C. K. Russell	Kidsons Impey, Glasgow	642,390·93
B. A. Jackson	Pannell Kerr Forster, Glasgow	625,631·25
P. J. Campbell	Pannell Kerr Forster, Aberdeen	585,341·66
G. Ritchie	Ernst and Young, Edinburgh	541,501·81
C. A. F. Hastings	Hastings and Co, Glasgow	493,208·22
P. C. Taylor	Cork Gully, Edinburgh	354,351·58
J. D. Laurie	Cork Gully, Edinburgh	337,315·45
G. I. Rankin	Cork Gully, Glasgow	299,835·95
O. L. Balfour	Cork Gully, Edinburgh	287,910·66
F. Blin	Cork Gully, Glasgow	267,467·30
A O'Boyle	F. L. Walker, Glasgow	254,850·18
N. M. Sharp	Ernst and Young, Aberdeen	236,039·25
N. J. McNeill	BDO Binder Hamlyn, Glasgow	232,461·89
W. T. M. Cleghorn	Cork Gully, Edinburgh	231,691·42
D. H. Beedie	Ernst and Young, Dundee	214,440·89
R. B. M. Graham	Cork Gully, Edinburgh	166,954·11
W. Hecht	F. L. Walker, Glasgow	129,101·74

(ii) In those cases where the final outcome is known, payments to trustees have exceeded 50 per cent. of the total debt in the following number of cases:

Year	Number of Cases
1986	None
1987	None
1988	None
1989	3
1990	31

(iii) The block fee system of remuneration for trustees was introduced on 1 October 1990 and applied only to awards of sequestration made on or after that date ie where the first accounting period ended on or after 1 April 1991. In the period 1 October 1990 to 30 September 1991 there were 6,965 awards of sequestration. Of these, in 175 cases the trustee was elected and the provisions of the block fees scheme did not therefore apply and in a further 174 cases the block fee was disapplied. In the balance of 6,616 cases the trustees were remunerated under the block fee arrangement.

(iv) In sequestration under the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985 dividends were paid to ordinary creditors as follows:

Year	Number of Cases
1985	Not applicable
1986	None
1987	None
1988	None
1989	4
1990	11

Trustees

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* the number of awards of sequestration made and *(b)* the total gross payments in respect of trustees' funds and refunded to trustees for each year since 1985.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* The number of awards of sequestration made since 1985 was as follows:

Year	Number of awards
1985	295
1986	437
1987	834
1988	1,457
1989	2,344
1990	4,364
1991	7,782

Gross payments to trustees ie including outlays, statutory fees, remuneration and VAT, but excluding recoveries, were as follows:

Financial year	Gross payments (£000s)
1985-86	Nil
1986-87	13
1987-88	418
1988-89	2,415
1989-90	6,390
1990-91	10,880

Sequestrations

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many sequestrations were awarded in each sheriff court for each year since 1985.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* Since 1 April 1986 when the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985 came into effect awards in each sheriff court have been as follows:

Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985

Sequestrations awarded in each sheriff court 1985-89

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Glasgow	46	99	186	302	509	1,032
Edinburgh	56	78	139	197	360	792
Duns	1	5	10	9	28	24
Haddington	13	16	17	21	87	166
Jedburgh	4	7	10	17	24	83
Linlithgow	11	30	72	63	171	273
Peebles	0	0	5	3	11	30
Selkirk	3	8	9	10	39	58
Campbeltown	0	2	4	6	13	18
Dumbarton	8	17	28	52	92	174
Dunoon	1	5	6	18	19	29
Greenock	3	13	30	25	62	72
Kilmarnock	12	31	43	111	209	386
Oban	1	3	5	10	15	26
Paisley	12	27	35	83	146	229
Rothesay	1	2	5	8	10	4
Airdrie	9	18	44	60	149	396
Ayr	12	32	35	84	204	273
Dumfries	5	22	13	30	85	112
Hamilton	26	43	54	101	233	457
Kirkcudbright	4	5	4	9	32	33
Lanark	7	13	18	20	30	62
Stranraer	2	9	10	8	9	27
Alloa	6	9	5	24	66	73
Arbroath	5	5	10	33	43	43
Cupar	6	13	19	36	43	73
Dundee	3	28	65	85	87	112
Dunfermline	10	23	33	84	209	494
Falkirk	6	14	31	163	299	527
Forfar	3	7	10	12	26	34
Kirkcaldy	21	16	68	136	336	593
Perth	9	20	29	28	70	127
Stirling	5	15	20	31	145	160
Aberdeen	30	73	173	233	200	268
Banff	1	3	12	9	13	34
Dingwall	3	10	9	15	20	30
Dornoch	0	2	6	2	9	10
Elgin	4	19	31	49	84	116
Fort William	1	4	5	2	9	32
Inverness	2	17	35	37	51	107
Kirkwall	2	11	4	5	3	18
Lerwick	1	1	3	3	6	16
Lochmaddy	1	0	1	5	2	1
Peterhead	7	12	53	37	36	50
Portree	1	3	2	1	8	13
Stonehaven	2	9	27	25	39	41
Stornoway	0	14	5	1	4	7
Tain	3	7	4	12	11	27
Wick	1	5	2	3	6	15
TOTAL AWARDS	370	834	1,457	2,344	4,364	7,782

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each year since 1989 the names of the 10 trustees who were most frequently appointed in sequestrations, and for each year the number of cases to which each was appointed.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* Following the coming into effect on 1 April 1986 of the provisions of the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985 the staffing levels and administration costs of the office of the accountant in bankruptcy have been as follows:

	Average number of staff	*Administration costs (£)*
1986-87	6	73,000
1987-88	9	94,000
1988-89	15	221,000
1989-90	26	400,000
1990-91	38	730,000

Bankruptcy

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each year since commencement of the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985 the number of employees and the total cost of the administration of the Account of Bankruptcies office.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* The information requested is as follows:

Permanent trustee	*Number of cases*
1989	
R. S. MacGregor, Pannell Kerr Forster, Edinburgh	383
J. C. J. Readman, Ernst and Young, Glasgow	244
B. A. Jackson, Pannell Kerr Forster, Glasgow	209
N. Robinson, Kidsons Impey, Glasgow	177
P. J. Campbell, Pannell Kerr Forster, Aberdeen	162
N. M. Sharp, Ernst and Young, Aberdeen	55
N. J. McNeil, BDO, Binder Hamlyn, Glasgow	55
C. A. F. Hastings, Hastings and Co., Glasgow	48
A. W. O'Boyle, F. L. Walker, Glasgow	44
G. Ritchie, Ernst and Young, Edinburgh	41
1990	
N. Robinson, Kidsons Impey, Glasgow	899
R. S. MacGregor, Pannell Kerr Forster, Edinburgh	510
B. A. Jackson, Pannell Kerr Forster, Glasgow	451
J. C. J. Readman, Ernst and Young, Glasgow	446
P. J. Campbell, Pannell Kerr Forster, Aberdeen	302
G. Ritchie, Ernst and Young, Edinburgh	265
C. K. Russell, Kidsons Impey, Glasgow	244
J. D. Laurie, Cork Gully, Edinburgh	150
N. J. McNeil, BDO, Glasgow	105
G. I. Rankin, Cork Gully, Glasgow	86
1991	
B. A. Jackson, Pannell Kerr Forster, Glasgow	722
J. C. J. Readman, Ernst and Young, Glasgow	690
N. Robinson, Kidsons Impey, Glasgow	587
R. S. MacGregor, Pannell Kerr Forster, Edinburgh	570
C. K. Russell, Kidsons Impey, Glasgow	512
J. D. Laurie, Cork Gully, Edinburgh	486
G. Ritchie, Ernst and Young, Edinburgh	364
C. A. F. Hastings, Hastings and Co., Glasgow	240
G. I. Rankin, Cork Gully, Glasgow	173
A. C. Thomson, Thomson and Co., Dunfermline	159

Further and Higher Education

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what comparative data he has on participation rates of young people in further and higher education including *(a)* numbers achieving higher education entry qualifications, *(b)* numbers entering higher education, *(c)* numbers entering higher and further education, *(d)* numbers with no qualifications when leaving school and *(e)* numbers entering work with no training, in Scotland and other EC and OECD nations.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 18 February 1992]:* I shall write to the hon. Member. A copy of my reply will be placed in the House Library.

Health Service Staff

Mr. Doran: To asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what was the number of nursing and midwifery staff, including temporary agency staff, in the health service in Scotland on 1 January 1986; and what was the corresponding figure on 1 September 1991;

(2) what was the number of administrative and clerical staff in the health service in Scotland on 1 January 1986; and what was the corresponding figure for 1 September 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 February 1992]:* This information is not available centrally in the form requested.

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of staff graded as general or senior managers in the health service in Scotland on 1 January 1986; and what was the corresponding number on 1 September 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 February 1992]:* As at 1 January 1986, the term "general manager" was applied only to the most senior officer in each health board. Since that date it has been extended to other management posts. The term "senior manager" has been progressively introduced into the NHS in Scotland from 22 December 1987 when new arrangements for the remuneration and conditions of service of persons employed in a range of senior management posts came into operation.

Nurses

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has in respect of each health board in Scotland regarding *(a)* the number of enrolled nurses currently employed by the health board and *(b)* the number of enrolled nurses who are currently engaged in an enrolled nurse conversion or bridging course.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* As at 30 September 1991, the latest date for which figures are available, the number of enrolled nurses employed by health boards is set out in table 1.

Table 1
Number of enrolled nurses (whole-time equivalents)

	Number
Argyll and Clyde	636·8
Ayrshire and Arran	355·8
Borders	140·4

	Number
Dumfries and Galloway	217·0
Fife	684·7
Forth Valley	385·2
Grampian	1,040·1
Greater Glasgow	1,661·5
Highland	275·3
Lanarkshire	1,008·1
Lothian	1,000·7
Orkney	76·9
Shetland	54·1
Tayside	981·7
Western Isles	37·5
Scotland	8,555·8

Information by health board on the number of enrolled nurses currently engaged on an enrolled nurse conversion or bridging course is not held centrally. The numbers of enrolled nurses on bridging courses in each college of nursing and midwifery at 30 September 1991 is, however, given in table 2 below.

Table 2
Number of enrolled nurses on bridging courses

	Number
Argyll and Clyde	27
Ayrshire and Arran	48
Scottish Borders	18
Dumfries and Galloway	20
Fife	37
Forth Valley	46
Foresterhill	37
Greater Glasgow	103
Highland	53
Lanarkshire	89
Lothian	132
Tayside	99
Scotland	709

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will order a public inquiry into the proposals of Scottish Nuclear to erect storage facilities for waste nuclear fuel at Torness and Hunterston.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 17 February 1992]:* Scottish Nuclear Ltd. would require the consent of the Secretary of State in terms of the Electricity Act 1989 to build a dry store for spent advanced gas-cooled reactor fuel. No such application for consent has yet been made to the Secretary of State. The 1989 Act provides for a public inquiry to be held to consider unresolved objections to any application made in terms of section 36 of that Act.

Lothian Health Board

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations have been held with the officials and members of Lothian health board to discuss their latest management proposals; and if he will make a statement outlining the Government's view of the proposals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* Officials of the management executive of the national health service in Scotland are aware that Lothian health board is considering possible changes to the structure of the units of the board and I would expect the board to notify the management executive of its proposals before a final decision is taken. Changes in unit management arrangements are a matter for the board itself.

Employment Initiatives

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what initiatives are being taken to improve employment prospects in Argyll and Bute; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 20 February 1992]:* Argyll and the Islands Enterprise is currently preparing its business plan for 1992-93. It has created some 275 new jobs in their area during the current financial year and I am confident that they will continue to give high priority to employment prospects.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 24 February 1992

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Repossession Orders

Mr. Cox: To ask the Attorney-General how many repossession orders in favour of building societies or other lending institutions were made by Wandsworth county court in 1979, 1990 and 1991.

The Attorney-General: The 1979 figures are not available. The total number of mortgage possession actions entered, suspended orders and orders made during 1990 and 1991, in each county court in England and Wales, is contained in two lists which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament. These figures do not indicate how many houses have been repossessed through the courts as not all of the orders made will have resulted in the issue and execution of warrants of possession. At this stage, the 1991 figures are provisional and therefore liable to revision in the future.

TRANSPORT

Vehicle Test Certificates

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will supply the figures of the numbers of Ministry of Transport test certificates for both heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles that have been reported stolen over the last five years from heavy goods vehicle and private vehicle testing stations.

Mr. Chope: The numbers of heavy goods and public service vehicle testing certificates reported as stolen in each of the last five years are as follows:

	HGV test certificates		
Year	*Motor vehicle test certificates*	*Trailer test certificates*	*PSV test certificates*
1987	3,499	1,189	1,077
1988	111	48	0
1989	0	0	0
1990	0	0	250
1991	1,160	1,005	505
Total	4,770	2,242	1,832

Black Cabs

Mr. Bendall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the steps that are taken to ensure the fitness of applicants for black cab licences in London; what action he is considering to tighten the scrutiny procedure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: On my behalf, the Public Carriage Office of the Metropolitan police already carries out stringent checks on the suitability of applicants for taxi drivers' licences in London, including a criminal record check. It also carries out further checks on each driver every three years when his or her licence is due to be renewed. It is difficult to know what effective additional checks might reasonably be carried out.

I am satisfied that the present procedures do ensure, as far as possible, that licensed cab drivers are suitable for the task they undertake, although no such system can give a 100 per cent. guarantee.

There is at present no regime for the licensing of minicabs or minicab drivers in London. I have commissioned a working party to make recommendations on the framework needed to ensure that users of taxis and minicabs in London can travel in reasonable safety and security.

Pollution, Bristol Channel

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress of measures to reduce pollution of the Bristol channel by the dumping of refuse or the pumping out of bilges by vessels in transit.

Mr. McLoughlin: Standards for the discharge of oil and garbage from ships are set by international convention and implemented by domestic legislation which applies to all ships in United Kingdom waters. The Department's marine surveyors monitor compliance with the regulations as part of their responsibilities when they go on board ships to undertake port state control inspections. In addition the marine pollution control unit's surveillance aircraft regularly overfly all United Kingdom waters, including the Bristol channel, to check for infringements which may also be reported by ships in the area.

The Department recently completed research into the shore provision of reception facilities for oil and garbage. Although the report of the findings is still being considered, indications are that such provision is adequate.

BR (Disabled People)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answers to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) on 5 November 1991, *Official Report*, columns *23-24* on British Rail's duties in respect of access to its services by disabled people, whether British Rail is permitted to make arrangements to exclude wheelchair accessible taxis from Eltham station.

Mr. Freeman: It is for the courts to interpret the law. My advice is, however, that what British Rail is alleged to be doing at Eltham station is not contrary to the London Cab and Stage Carriage Act 1907. I am, however, disturbed to learn that its effect may be to reduce the transport opportunities open to disabled people, and I am writing to the chairman of British Rail about it.

Rail Investment

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the percentage change in British Rail rail investment between *(a)* 1964 to 1970, *(b)* 1970 to 1974, *(c)* 1974 to 1979 and *(d)* 1979 to 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The percentage changes in real terms for the given periods were as follows:

	Per cent.
1964-1970	−57
1970-1974	+48
1974-1979	+13
1979-1990-91	+55

The 1991-92 financial year is not yet complete, so no outturn figures is available.

Over-height Vehicles

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish, or give references to, the latest report into the problem of over-height road vehicles, or their loads, hitting bridges, overhead structures, or the roofs of tunnels; and what methods are currently in use or are being developed to deter or prevent their use of approaches to such obstructions.

Mr. Chope: The recommendations of a joint British Rail and Department of Transport working party were published in 1988 in a report, entitled "A Strategy for the Reduction of Bridge Bashing", published by HMSO.

The Department has made progress with implementing the working party's recommendations. Last month I announced proposals for increasing driver awareness of the height of the vehicle, and the award of contracts worth £1 million for warning systems at 15 high-risk low bridge sites. Other measures include better road signing and road improvements to increase the headroom at some low bridges.

Cradlewell Bypass

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the cost of the Transport and Road Research Laboratory pilot study of traffic origins and destinations prepared for the Cradlewell bypass project, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Mr. Chope: In autumn of 1991 the Transport and Road and Research Laboratory carried out the "before" part of a study to improve understanding of traveller responses to road improvements at a total cost of £109,000. This study forms part of a larger research project being undertaken by the Department of Transport.

Blind Spots

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the number of accidents due to blind spots involving lorries over 12 tonnes, first used before 1 October 1988, in each of the last three years.

Mr. Chope: The statistics requested are not available. It is almost impossible to prove that a blind spot was the cause of any particular road accident.

British Rail Leasing

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how a long-term finance lease by British Rail would be capitalised for public expenditure purposes.

Mr. Freeman: Leased assets will be capitalised for external financing limit—EFL—purposes in the same way as if they had been bought. The capitalisation of such leases follows standard accounting practices applying to all similar business undertakings whether in the private or public sector. Leasing is a form of borrowing, and the Government need to ensure that BR borrows according to its means; hence it is brought within the same EFL control as all other borrowing.

M42-A45 Junction

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress of road improvements at the M42-A45 junction adjacent to the Birmingham exhibition centre.

Mr. Chope: Good progress is being made on a number of planned highway improvements at this junction. Statutory orders will soon be published for the construction of a new dedicated slip road from the M42 northbound to the A45 westbound. Design work is well underway on a scheme to improve access from the national exhibition centre to the M42 northbound. Work will also begin soon on a scheme to improve the roundabout itself.

An extra camera has been installed to improve television surveillance of traffic conditions at the junction and new motorway gantry signs will be erected later this year on the approaches to it. In the longer term the M42 is to be widened and consultants have been asked to investigate the options for improved access to the NEC and other facilities.

Rotherhithe Tunnel

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he expects continuous TV surveillance to be installed in Rotherhithe tunnel for traffic control;

(2) when he expects work to be put in hand to improve ventilation in the Rotherhithe tunnel.

Mr. Chope: Management of the Rotherhithe tunnel—including ventilation and TV surveillance—is a matter for the London boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Southwark. I understand that discussions are taking place on the need to install surveillance equipment in the tunnel, linked to the new east London traffic control centre.

Lorries

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has made representations to the European Community for lorries weighing over 12 tonnes, and used prior to 1 October 1988, to be obliged to be fitted with additional close proximity mirrors on their near-side, and, if the articulated type, also fitted with additional wide-angle mirrors.

Mr. Chope: The directive which requires the fitment of additional close proximity mirrors and, in some cases, additional wide-angled mirrors has applied to new lorries since 1 October 1988. The Government have not sought a retrospective requirement that vehicles manufactured before that date be fitted with such mirrors.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will extend the MOT test to require all lorries over 12 tonnes to be fitted with additional close proximity mirrors on their near-side and, if articulated, to be fitted also with additional wide-angle mirrors.

Mr. Chope: No. It would not be reasonable to require vehicles manufactured before 1 October 1988 to be fitted in such a way in the absence of any proven road safety benefit.

Motor Vehicles

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider amending the construction and use regulations for motor vehicles to prohibit the use of fluorolastomel or veton.

Mr. Chope: As no danger arises from the use of fluorolastomel or veton in the normal course of construction or use of motor vehicles, there is no reason to amend construction and use regulations to prohibit these materials. There is only a risk from these materials if they have been subjected to high temperatures. For motor vehicles this is only likely to be a problem when scrapping burnt out vehicles. Health and safety inspectors are aware of the risks and give appropriate advice.

Rail Services

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what standby assets are specifically allocated for contingencies by British Rail InterCity, French and German railways;

(2) if he will issue a general directive to British Rail to seek to reduce InterCity train cancellations, even if this involves a lower utilisation of capital assets;

(3) if he will tabulate the cancellation records of British Rail InterCity and the French and German railways;

(4) if he will meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss the relationship between the improved financial results on InterCity and the increase in the number of InterCity train cancellations.

Mr. Freeman: As part of the quality of service objectives agreed between the Government and British Rail, InterCity already has an objective to operate 99·5 per cent. of its scheduled services. The actual performance achieved in recent years is as follows:

	Percentage of scheduled services
1987-88	99·5
1988-89	99·0
1989-90	98·0
1990-91	97·8

Not all cancellations are due to rolling stock problems. I understand that crew shortages, particularly in the south-east, have been a major factor in the recent decline in performance.

It is a management matter for BR to judge how much spare capacity is needed for maintenance and other contingencies. The Department does not hold information on this or on the performance of French and German railways in this area.

I have no reason to believe that there is any direct link between InterCity's financial performance and the rate of cancellations.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all the television advertising campaigns and all other publicity campaigns costing over £100,000 to be carried out by his Department in February, March, April, May or June of the current year.

Mr. McLoughlin: My Department currently proposes to carry out a child road safety publicity campaign in April. Further road safety publicity campaigns in the period to June are under consideration.

Helmsdale Auxiliary Coastguard

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) why he proposes to reduce the Helmsdale auxiliary coastguard complement to seven; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what changes he proposes to make to the present roles of the Helmsdale auxiliary coastguard.

Mr. McLoughlin: The recently completed sector and auxiliary coastguard review defined the Coastguard's coastal commitments and reviewed the availability, readiness and training of coastguard personnel to meet current requirements. It concluded that the present day coastguard needs modern bases from which to operate. The present complement at the Helmsdale auxiliary coastguard station is 11 members. Their present roles will not change, and the premises currently occupied will not be released. Equipment utilised by the team is to remain unchanged, except that the Land Rover presently in use will be replaced by a modern 4WD Vauxhall Brava in March 1992. The complement will be reduced by four members initially, however a further two will be recruited in the Dunbeath area to the north in order to fulfil the initial response requirement between Helmsdale and Wick. It is anticipated that these changes will be implemented by the end of the financial year 1992-93.

A21

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the road improvement schemes and their estimated time of completion that are being planned for the A21 trunk road.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 21 February 1992]:* The road improvement schemes in the national programme for the A21 trunk road are as follows:

Tonbridge bypass to Pembury bypass
Kippings Cross to Lamberhurst improvement
Lamberhurst bypass
Lamberhurst to Flimwell improvement
Hurst Green bypass
Silver Hill improvement

These schemes are at varying stages of development. Their completion will depend on progress that can be made with the design, statutory and other procedures and the availability of funds.

In addition, there are a number of smaller scale works in the regional programme, mostly aimed at improving safety and traffic flow.

Leicester Eastern Bypass

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in relation to the tender secured by Travis Morgan to act as advisers on the proposed route of the Leicester eastern bypass, if he will state the total number of companies who submitted unsuccessful tenders and, where possible, their names and addresses.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 21 February 1992]:* Two companies submitted unsuccessful tenders. They were Sir Owen Williams and Partners, 41 Whitcomb street,

London, WC2H 7DT; and Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners, Earley House, London road, Reading, Berkshire RG6 1BL.

National Parks

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what appraisal he has made of transport needs to and within each of the national parks.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 21 Feburary 1992]:* My right hon. and learned Friend's responsibility is for the trunk road network, which forms a small proportion of the transport infrastructure serving national parks. The Government's policy remains as stated in the 1987 White Paper:

"In National Parks the Government is committed to ensuring that no new trunk routes will be constructed or an existing road upgraded unless there is a compelling need which cannot be met by any reasonable alternative means."

Policy for trunk roads in national parks in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Other transport needs are a matter for local authorities, passenger transport executives, and British Rail, in consultation with the national park authorities where appropriate.

CIVIL SERVICE

Civil Service (New Tasks)

42. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what new tasks have been assumed by the civil service in the past year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: As departmental and agency reports show, the civil service is responding to a wide range of new tasks flexibly, effectively and efficiently. The question of functions and priorities is constantly under review.

Racial Discrimination

43. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what measures he is taking to counteract racial discrimination in the civil service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We continue to implement the servicewide programme for action on race, introduced in May 1990. There has been an increase in ethnic minority representation among staff. Copies of a recent report on progress have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

THE ARTS

Royal Academy

32. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he last visited the Royal Academy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I visited the Royal Academy on 15 January when I formally opened the Andrea Mantegna exhibition and was a guest there at the Japan festival gala one month later. I have also again seen the Mantegna exhibition, and very splendid it was too. I am delighted to congratulate the Royal Academy on its magnificent and almost entirely self-sufficient work of refurbishment and pleased that the Government were able to contribute to the renovations via the museums and galleries improvement fund.

Natural History Museum

34. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what is *(a)* the current number of employees and *(b)* the current funding for the natural history museum.

Mr. Renton: There are currently 672 staff in post at the natural history museum. In 1991-92 the museum will receive £27·8 million grant-in-aid.

Libraries

35. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will meet the Association of London Authorities to discuss public library provision.

Mr. Renton: Yes. The association should first write to me outlining its points for discussion.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will meet representatives from the Association of District Councils to discuss library provision.

Mr. Renton: Yes. The association should first write to me outlining its points for discussion.

Welsh Arts Council

36. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he next intends to meet the chairman of the arts council for Wales to discuss funding.

Mr. Renton: I meet the chairman of the Welsh Arts Council from time to time to discuss matters of mutual interest. I met the chairman in May and October last year and look forward to meeting him again in the near future.

Museums and Galleries (Attendance)

37. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Minister for the Arts how many people visited the national museums and galleries in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Renton: I was delighted to see that it is estimated that more than 21 million people visited the 11 national museums and galleries for which I am responsible during 1991.

Galleries and Theatres (Regulations)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister for the Arts what arrangements his Department has to assess the effect of proposed regulations affecting museums, art galleries and theatres prior to implementation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The Office of Arts and Libraries carefully monitors the likely impact any proposed regulations might have on museums, art galleries and theatres before their implementation. The number of such regulations is, however, small.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Customs Checks

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he intends to review the number of routine checks by Customs officials at Scottish airports; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Routine checks by Customs officers are becoming less of a feature of customs work at all ports and airports as a result of that department's strategy of more flexible deployment of staff based on intelligence and assessment of risk and concentrating on drugs, obscene material, instruments of terrorism and other high priority smuggling targets.

The strategy is kept under constant review.

Customs (Honesty System)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the honesty system employed by Customs and Excise at Cardiff airport.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The arrangements at Cardiff international airport are part of Customs' strategy to provide a more flexible deployment of staff according to intelligence and assessment of risk and targeted on the key areas of drugs, instruments of terrorism, pornography and so on. We aim to allow honest travellers the freest movement through our frontiers.

Customs will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the approach but it is too early to make an assessment.

Income Tax

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the cost of collecting income tax from Scottish-based taxpayers; and how this relates to the Inland Revenue's calculations of the late 1970s.

Mr. Maude: Information specific to taxpayers resident in Scotland is not available.

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give details of Scottish-based income tax which is collected via computer-based offices; and what assessment he has made of the extent to which computers make the collections easier and less costly to collect.

Mr. Maude: No information is available on total income tax collected in Scotland as opposed to the liabilities of those resident there. Computerisation projects are subject to rigorous investment appraisal before approval to proceed is given. In the 10 years to 1991 a reduction of 6,260 Inland Revenue staff is attributable to computerisation.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Abergavenny chamber of trade concerning the uniform business rate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I have received a letter.

Energy Efficiency

Ms. Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consider introducing capital allowances for equipment installed as part of an energy efficiency drive.

Mr. Maude: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Taxpayers

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the number of people paying tax in each year since 1978-79, giving the numbers on basic rate and higher rate tax.

Mr. Maude: Latest estimates are given in table 1.5 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1991".

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest estimate of the number of taxpayers divided into basic rate and higher rate, and by sex, in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maude: Estimates at 1991-92 levels of income are as follows:

	Number of taxpayers million
Basic rate men	14·2
Higher rate men	1·4
Basic rate women	9·3
Higher rate women	0·2
TOTAL	25·1

Single Person's Allowance

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost in 1992-93 of an increase in the single person's tax allowance of *(a)* £50, *(b)* £100, *(c)* £150, *(d)* £200, *(e)* £250 and *(f)* £300, giving the numbers taken out of tax in each case, in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maude: Estimates are given in the table.

Increase in personal allowance[1] *£*	*Exchequer cost in 1992-93*[2] *£ million*	*Exchequer cost in full year*[2] *£ million*	*Numbers taken out of tax thousands*
50	260	330	100
100	510	650	190
150	770	970	300
200	1,020	1,300	400
250	1,270	1,620	480
300	1,520	1,940	570

[1] Including the personal allowances for the over-65s and over-75s.

[2] Over and above statutory indexation.

Married Couples Allowance

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the effect on revenues in 1992-93 of freezing the married couples allowance instead of index-linking it.

Mr. Maude: A yield of about £180 million in the first year and £230 million in a full year.

Civil Service Relocation

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further plans he has to relocate civil service staff to the regions; what performance assessment he has made of the civil servants in the north-west; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 4 December 1991, *Official Report*, columns *163-64*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway). Under the Government's relocation policy, it is for Departments and agencies to review the location of their work regularly and systematically, with the intention of finding sites offering better value for money. Departmental Ministers will announce their own decisions on significant relocations on completion of the essential processes of assessment and consultation.

Performance assessments of civil servants are made by their line managers within the department or agency in which they work. These assessments are neither collected nor analysed on a regional basis.

Civil Servants

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress is being made to reduce the number of civil servants.

Mr. Maples: I refer my hon. Friend to table 4.13 of the "Statistical Supplement to the 1991 Autumn Statement", Cm. 1920, presented to the House last month, which shows that civil service manpower fell by 171,000 between 1978-79 and 1991-92.

Civil Servants (Scotland)

Mr. Strang: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many civil servants from Departments and agencies other than the Scottish Office are based in Scotland.

Mr. Maples: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) on 21 February 1992, at columns *308-10*.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements his Department has to assess proposals for regulations on competitive tendering and their effect on existing small firms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: My Department well appreciates the effects of changes of policy on small firms. When assessing proposals for regulations on competitive tendering, full consideration is given to the impact upon small firms. My Department consults the Department of Employment, which has responsibility for Government policy on small firms. Minimising the costs of regulation for business is an important part of the Government's programme to create the conditions to promote prosperity.

Training

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received in favour of treating training as an investment qualifying for an investment allowance against corporation tax.

Mr. Maude: I have not received any such representations.

Earnings

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of taxpayers earned over £55,000 a year gross in each of the past five tax years.

Mr. Maude: Estimates are readily available for both 1990-91 and 1991-92. About three quarters of 1 per cent. and just under 1 per cent. of taxpayers respectively are estimated to have gross earnings from employment and self-employment of over £55,000 in these years.

Taxes

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those taxes which have to be renewed annually by resolution of the House.

Mr. Maude: Income tax and corporation tax.

Fiscal Drag

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest estimate of the amount of revenue that would accrue to the Government from fiscal drag if the tax system were simply indexed in the 1992 Budget, in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maude: The amount of real fiscal drag that accrues to the Government in any one year depends on the rate of growth of the economy and on the composition of demand. But on average over a cycle it might be expected to raise the ratio of tax receipts to GDP by about 0·2 percentage points per year.

Disabled Taxpayers

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what, in the latest year for which information is available, is the total number of people in receipt of a disability benefit who pay income tax; and how many pay VAT.

Mr. Maude: The latest estimates for 1991-92 of the numbers of people in receipt of a disability benefit who pay income tax are as follows:

	Thousands
Invalidity benefit	220
Severe disablement allowance	20

These estimates are based on Department of Social Security estimates of the total numbers in receipt of each benefit and information on taxpayers derived from the results of the 1990 family expenditure survey. The figures are, therefore, provisional. VAT is chargeable on a wide range of consumer expenditure and it seems likely that everybody has to pay some during the course of a year.

Tax Inspectors

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest estimate of the amount of revenue brought in by each tax inspector in a year; and what is their average salary.

Mr. Maude: In the year to 31 March 1991 the average yield of inspectors of taxes in local offices involved in

counter evasion and avoidance and technical review work was £700,000. A figure for average salary is not available, but the average overall cost of such an inspector was £32,000.

Business Expansion Scheme

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was for each year of the years of the existance of the business expansion scheme, the total amount invested in BES, the total cost to the Exchequer, and the percentage and amount of BES money invested, and associated cost to the Exchequer, in residential and assured tenancy schemes.

Mr. Maude: The business expansion scheme was extended to include investment in private rented housing in 1988-89. The latest estimates are as follows:

	Amounts invested			*Cost of income tax relief*	
	Total	*of which investment in private rented housing*		*Total*	*of which in respect of investment in private rented housing*
	£ million	*amount £ million*	*percentage*	*£ million*	*£ million*
1983-84	105	—	—	50	—
1984-85	148	—	—	75	—
1985-86	157	—	—	85	—
1986-87	169	—	—	95	—
1987-88	201	—	—	120	—
[1]1988-89	420	368	88	150	130
[1]1989-90	211	160	76	75	55
[1]1990-91	320	280	88	120	105

[1] provisional estimates.
Information is not yet available for 1991-92.

Taxation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will bring up to date his answer of 25 November 1983, *Official Report*, columns *316-17* showing the proportion of taxation levied on capital, labour and other.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* In the table, taxes on capital include corporation tax, North sea taxes and royalties, income tax on rent, dividends, interest and so on, capital gains tax, inheritance tax, development land tax, and national non-domestic rates. Taxes on labour include income tax on earned and self-employment income—including pensions and benefits to the unemployed—and employer's and employees' national insurance contributions. Other taxes—mainly taxes on expenditure and community charge—are not allocated.

On this basis the figures for 1990-91 are as follows:

Capital	*Labour*	*Other*	*Percent Total*
19·4	44·0	36·6	100·0

Mortgage Tax Relief

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of people receiving mortgage tax relief are first-time buyers.

Mr Maude *[holding answer 21 February 1992]:* Information on the proportion of all those receiving mortgage tax relief who were first-time buyers when the mortgage was taken out is not available. Almost 50 per cent. of those mortgages taken out in the year ending September 1991 were for first-time buyers.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer under what conditions and at what rate he expects to initiate the taxation of invalidity benefit; if he proposes at the same time to review the taxation liability of the invalidity benefit supplement to the retirement pension; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 21 February 1992]:* It remains the Government's intention to bring invalidity benefit into taxation when operationally possible. When taxation is introduced the benefit will form part of the recipient's taxable income and will therefore be taxed at the taxpayer's marginal rate. The Government have no intention of changing the tax treatment of the addition to retirement pension given to those previously entitled to the invalidity allowance.

Alcohol Duty

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy relating to European Community legislation with regard to duty on *(a)* vin doux naturel and *(b)* vin de liqueur compared with still table wine.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 20 February 1992]:* The UK excise duty bands of wines and made-wines are based solely on alcoholic content. These constitute neutral and objective demarcations between alcoholic drinks of different strengths. I see no reason to make any fiscal distinction between fermented and distilled alcohol and will seek to retain our existing arrangements in future EC negotiations.

Royal Mint

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the members of the board of the Royal Mint, together with the ranges of pay applicable to their position and any appropriate qualifications.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 20 February 1992]:* The members of the management board of the Royal Mint, their current ranges of pay, including performance-related pay, and appropriate qualifications are:

Member and Relevant Qualification	*Pay Range £*
Mr. A. D. Garrett MA Deputy Master and Comptroller (Chief Executive)	up to [1]66,000
Mr. D. C. Snell FCMA MBCS Director of Finance and Corporate Services (Deputy Chief Executive)	[2]42,724 to 47,921
Mr. A. R. W. Lotherington Sales Director	[2][3]37,928 to 49,671
Mr. R. D. Burchill MSc C.Eng MIEE Director of Operations	[2]34,667 to 46,122
Mr. B. D. Williams Marketing Director	[2]26,622 to 41,120
Mr. C. J. J. Boyle FIPM Director, Human Resources and Establishment Officer	[2]26,622 to 41,120
Mr. S. G. Cameron MC Non-Executive Director	[4]3,000
Mr. J. Burnett-Stuart BA Non-Exective Director	[4]3,000

[1] Including special performance-related bonus.
[2] Excluding bonuses payable under the Mint's profit-sharing scheme.
[3] Including London weighting.
[4] Fee paid.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Lockerbie Disaster

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make contact with Mr. Mazn Abu Shriff about responsibility for the Lockerbie air disaster; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by the Foreign Secretary on 14 November. A thorough three-year investigation into the Lockerbie disaster by the Dumfries and Galloway police revealed no evidence to suggest that any other countries or groups were behind the attack on Pan Am 103.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the television advertising campaigns and all other publicity campaigns costing over £100,000 to be carried out by his Department in February, March, April, May or June of the current year.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is continuing its campaign of consular publicity. For the period in question new versions have been commissioned of films on drug smuggling and holiday medical insurance, made for free showing on TV as public service announcements and aimed at viewers planning holidays overseas. The cost of producing the films will be around £160,000.

Spanish customs Officers

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Spanish Government on the problems likely to be encountered by Scottish fish processors as a result of industrial action by Spanish customs officers.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I have had no discussions with the Spanish Government about the industrial action by Spanish customs agents. The embassy in Madrid is monitoring the situation.

WALES

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the television advertising campaigns and all other publicity campaigns costing over £100,000 to be carried out by his Department in February, March, April, May or June of the current year.

Mr. David Hunt: The Welsh Office does not plan to run any television campaigns. At present the Department plans to run the following three publicity campaigns:—

Education—including teacher shortage
Industry—including Enterprise Wales
Road Safety.

PRIME MINISTER

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will raise with President Bush the circumstances of involvement of non-Libyans in the Lockerbie bombing.

The Prime Minister: We remain in close contact with the United States over the Lockerbie bombing. We and the United States authorities share the view that there is no evidence to suggest that any countries other than Libya were responsible for the Lockerbie bombing.

HEALTH

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* hospitals and *(b)* clinics in the Greater Manchester area he has visited in the last year.

Mr. Waldegrave: My Ministers and I regularly visit hospitals and clinics in the course of our official duties and I last visited hospitals and clinics in the Greater Manchester area on Tuesday 12 March 1991.

Cataract Operations

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he issues to regional health authorities about adding cataract patients to the waiting list when it may be many months from diagnosis to preparedness for an operation for medical reasons.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Guidance on the management of waiting lists, issued by the Royal College of Surgeons in July 1991, states that patients should only be placed on a waiting list when they are clinically ready to undergo surgery. This advice is reiterated in departmental guidance which was issued to all health authorities at the same time.

Procurement

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements his Department has to assess the effect of proposed regulations made by his Department affecting companies involved in the procurement process; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Where regulations are planned which are likely to impact on the business sector a compliance cost assessment is prepared wherever possible in order to provide an indicative guide to costs and other effects. The Department seeks wherever possible to reduce the burden of regulations or other Government procedures on the business sector.

Dentists

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has evaluated the effect on national health service patients of any changes to dentists' fee structures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The health departments have been consulting dentists' representatives on dental remuneration. The health departments and the general dental

services committee have now agreed to re-examine the detailed elements of the levels of fees. They will simultaneously begin a more fundamental review of the dental remuneration system, as recommended by the doctors and dentists review body.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all the television advertising campaigns and all other publicity campaigns costing over £100,000 to be carried out by his Department in February, March, April, May or June of the current year.

Mr. Dorrell: Television advertising campaigns during February are:

Solvents Misuse
Nursing Regional

Other planned publicity campaigns likely to cost over £100,000 from February to June are:

Food Safety
Blood Donor Recruitment
Health Advice for Travellers
Nursing
AIDS
Drugs Misuse
Back to Sleep
Help with NHS Treatment Costs

Individual campaign allocations from April 1992 have yet to be confirmed.

Local Government Electors

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a table to show for England the number of local government electors on each of the 1985 to 1990 electoral registers, together with the estimated resident population for the mid point of each preceding year, including those aged 17 years and over, and 63 per cent. of those aged 16 years.

Mr. Dorrell: Numbers of local government electors on the 1985 to 1990 registers have been published in annual volumes of "Electoral Statistics"—series EL nos. 13 to 17— copies of which are available in the Library. I have arranged for the requested resident population estimates to be prepared and sent to the hon. Member, and a copy will then be placed in the Library.

Parkside Health Authority

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will begin a review into the adequacy of hospital services in Parkside health authority.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* We are satisfied that Parkside health authority is fulfilling its statutory duty to provide a comprehensive health service for its residents, within the resources available. We do not intend to institute an inquiry.

EMPLOYMENT

Small Businesses

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what arrangements his Department has to assess the effect of proposed new regulations affecting small firms and enterprises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: In line with the deregulation initiative and in common with other Government Departments, all regulations proposed or approved by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment are assessed for their impact on business. Details of these assessments are provided to the deregulation unit in the DTI and are publicly available. Because of my responsibilities for small firms, I take a keen interest in the impact on small firms of regulations proposed by other Government Departments.

Job Discrimination

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has made to those companies who impose an age limit of 50 years on job applicants to ensure people above this age group do not suffer discrimination.

Mr. Forth: The Department regularly urges employers to give proper recognition to the qualities that older workers possess. They should abandon arbitrary age limits in recruitment and treat everyone on their merits. To assist this process, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment announced on 11 February that we propose to set up an advisory group on older workers. The group will have an important role to play in the identification and dissemination of good practice in the employment of older people.

Wages Councils

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will update his answer to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East, *Official Report*, 22 April 1991, column *366*, concerning wages councils.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is not yet available but will be available during March.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list all the television advertising campaigns and all other publicity campaigns costing over £100,000 to be carried out by his Department in February, March, April, May or June of the current year.

Mr. Forth: No television advertising campaigns are planned by the Department between February and June this year. Other publicity campaigns costing more than £100,000 planned for this period are jobclubs, national training awards, high technology national training, employment action, and learning technologies.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Commonwealth of Independent States

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessments have been carried out of the impact of food aid on markets for locally produced food, on the development of the marketing system and on the prices that farmers receive in the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Mrs. Chalker: EC food aid is being sold through free market mechanisms so as to bolster the development of a

market infrastructure which will greatly assist the development of distribution systems and thus benefit local producers. No formal assessment has yet been carried out of the impact of this on emerging markets, as the process of providing food aid on a large scale is as yet in its infancy, and time is needed to assess its full effect.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total level of counterpart funds raised from the sale of food aid from all western donors in the Commonwealth of Independent States; and what mechanisms exist within the Overseas Development Administration, the EC and other bodies to monitor the use of these counterpart funds.

Mrs. Chalker: Unofficial estimates suggest that over 400 million roubles may be generated by the sale of food so far delivered under the European Community's 200 mecu (£140 million) food aid package for Moscow, St. Petersburg and other cities. These counterpart funds will be used to provide direct aid for needy groups such as families and pensioners—an approach which we endorse. The fund will be monitored by the Community task force which currently oversees the entire food aid operation. We are pleased to see that more staff have been made available to the European Commission in this area.

Turks and Caicos Islands

Mr. Fishburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are his plans for assistance to the Government of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Mrs. Chalker: Discussions on future assistance were held between the Government and the Turks and Caicos Islands—TCI—Government on 13 and 14 February.

Her Majesty's Government have agreed to provide nearly £24 million to the TCI Government over the three financial years beginning in 1992-93.

Of this, £18 million in bilateral funds and £1 million in regional funds will be used in support of projects agreed between the two governments in accoreance with the TCI Government's "Progress through Partnership" policy. It is anticipated that a further £4 million will be forthcoming over the same period for activities in support of the basic functions of government. Funds will also be used to clear part of the debt of the TCI Government inherited during the winding up of the national airline.

This is the largest aid package the United Kingdom has provided to TCI and is designed to assist the TCI Government in their policy of moving rapidly towards economic self-sufficiency.

Her Majesty's Government have agreed to further talks with the TCI over the next few years to monitor the progress of this aid in meeting the objective of economic self-sufficiency.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Education, Suffolk

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what extra money has been given to Suffolk county council to cover the teachers' salary award for 1992-93; and what advice he has given to the authority on how to meet the gap between its budget and its teachers' pay bill;

(2) if he will make a statement on the estimates he made of pupil numbers and teachers required for Suffolk county council for 1992-93; and how he expects those estimates to be altered following the teachers' salary settlement for 1992-93.

Mr. Fallon: The Government are paying additional grant to authorities in England of £56·5 million to help them cover the cost of the increase in teachers' pay recommended by the school teachers review body. Suffolk's share will be some £677,000. The Government's view is that with this additional support LEAs should have adequate headroom within the 1992-93 local authority finance settlement to cover the cost of the teachers' award in full, provided that they exploit their scope for making efficiency savings. It is for individual local authorities and schools with delegated budgets to determine spending priorities, including the number of teachers to be employed. In determining education's share of the overall 1992-93 settlement, the Government took account of the expected growth in pupil numbers nationally; and individual authorities' shares reflect the latest information available about the distribution of school pupils between authorities.

Palaeontology

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has had from geologists at the British Geological Survey about funding for palaeontology in Edinburgh.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend has received no such representations.

Ice Skating

Mr. Denis Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what discussions he has held with the National Skating Association regarding the need to replace the first-class coaching facilities lost to skating by the closure of the Richmond ice rink; and what proposals he has to ensure the future level of national and international skating skills in this country;

(2) what steps he has taken to assess the effects of the closure of the Richmond ice rink upon the development of the sport of ice skating in the United Kingdom and the training of future international competitors; also upon the public of the loss of these facilities for recreational use; and what steps he is taking to safeguard these interests.

Ms. Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what discussions have been held with the London borough of Richmond to plan a replacement of ice skating facilities in that area.

Mr. Atkins: Despite the closure of Richmond ice rink I understand that training facilities are available elsewhere. I welcome, however, the feasibility study, by a subsidiary of the National Skating Association and funded by the Foundation for Sport and the Arts, into a proposed national ice training centre.

Discussions are still taking place between the London borough of Richmond and the London Edinburgh Trust which owns the former ice rink, concerning an alternative site for an ice rink in the borough. It is for the National Skating Association to consult with the London borough of Richmond and others as appropriate, and I have not, therefore, held discussions with either body.

Argentina Animal Health Authority

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about any agreement between the Agricultural and Food Research Council's institute of animal health and the animal health authority of Argentina including the costs involved.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Pirbright laboratory of the AFRC institute for animal health—IAH—has agreed in principle to undertake a collaborative programme of research with the Centro de Investigacion en Ciencias Veterinarias—CICV—of Argentina's Instituto de Virologia del Instituto Nacional de Tecnologia Agropecuaria subject to agreement of suitable funding arrangements. The research will investigate the role of carrier animals in the epidemiology of foot and mouth disease, for which Pirbright is the European and world reference laboratory. The Argentine Government are considering whether to support the project. The CICV and IAH are also seeking support from the Commission of the European Communities as part of its scheme to promote bilateral scientific co-operation between laboratories in the Community and countries in Latin America, Asia and the Mediterranean.

Stratford School

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when Her Majesty's inspectors last visited Stratford school; and if the report was published.

Mr. Eggar: Two HMIs paid a routine visit to Stratford school on 4 December 1991. As with all such visits, there will be no published report.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much financial support he has given to Stratford school in the past 12 months.

Mr. Eggar: The annual maintenance grant for the financial year 1991-92 is some £1·5 million. In the last 12 months we have paid further sums amounting to some £100,000 for capital and special purposes.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the current pupil roll at Stratford school; and what proportion are resident in the borough of Newham.

Mr. Eggar: I understand that there are currently 570 pupils on roll at the school, of whom fewer than 2 per cent. are resident outside Newham.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he intends to take in respect of Stratford school.

Mr. Eggar: We shall continue to monitor the situation at the school and make further use of our powers to act when appropriate.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he has taken to date to deal with the current difficulties at Stratford school; and what has been the effect.

Mr. Eggar: My Department has communicated with the school on a range of matters. My right hon. and learned Friend has used his powers to intervene to ensure the reinstatement of the headteacher. He has also appointed Mrs. Daphne Gould and Mr. Eric Bolton as additional governors to the school. We have made it clear that we are keeping in close touch with the situation and we will not hesitate to use our powers further in the interests of the education of the pupils at the school.

PE Teachers

Ms. Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many qualified physical education teachers left training colleges in each of the last five years; and what is his Department's estimate for the number still in teaching.

Mr. Fallon: The table shows the numbers of students specialising in PE who successfully completed an initial teacher training course in England and Wales, in each year from 1985 to 1989, together with the number of these who were teaching in the maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools sector in England and Wales on 31 March 1990.

	ITT completers with main subject PE	*Of whom: teaching on 31 March 1990*
1985	654	369
1986	781	466
1987	661	428
1988	687	454
1989	571	394
Total	3,354	2,111

The remainder includes those who have not taught since qualifying or have left teaching, as well as those who are teaching in other sectors such as independent schools, or teaching outside England and Wales.

Sports Grounds

Ms. Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what response he has made to the report by the Institution of Structural Engineers "Appraisal of Sports Grounds", a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I received the institution's report with interest. I understand that it has been warmly welcomed by the Home Office, within whose responsibility sports ground safety falls, and whose "Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds" it complements.

Sensory Impairments

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what criteria were used in determining the outcome of Liverpool education authority's bid for funds to develop provision for children with dual sensory impairmants; how many bids from the north-west were successful; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: Bids under the grants for education support and training programme to encourage the development of regional provision for deaf-blind children were assessed against the criteria set out in the Department's published guidance. Bids were to be made on a regional basis, with

at least three local education authorities per bid unless geographical constraints made this impossible in practice. The successful bids were those thought most likely to secure lasting benefits both locally and nationally. Geographical representation was not a selection criterion, and none of the successful bids involved authorities in the north-west.

GCSE Coursework

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many letters he has received on the subject of GCSE coursework; and how many of these have supported his proposed changes in the extent of coursework.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has received a large volume of correspondence on this subject. The correspondents have expressed a range of views.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all the television advertising campaigns and all other publicity campaigns costing over £100,000 to be carried out by his Department in February, March, April, May or June of the current year.

Mr. Eggar: Publicity campaigns costing over £100,000 cover the following areas:

A touring exhibition, "Time for School", which was launched in January will continue during February and March.

A campaign of information for companies about tax relief on business gifts and charitable giving to educational institutions—February/April.

Information for parents about the National Curriculum —February/March.

Information for parents about testing at age 7 and 14—May/June.

In addition, the professional, industrial and commercial updating programme will continue to support and encourage colleges, polytechnics and universities to improve and increase their provision to meet the training needs of employers and their employees.

No television campaigns are planned for these months.

Mr. David Mogie

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to pay Mr. David Mogie, a student at Sunderland polytechnic, his bursary of £1,500; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: A cheque for the first instalment of the bursary was dispatched from this Department to Sunderland polytechnic on 29 January. The second instalment of £750 will be paid in April.

A-levels

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the drop-out rate from A-level courses in England and Wales each year from 1985.

Mr. Eggar: Comprehensive information on A-level drop-out rates is not readily available. However, estimates of the percentage of 16-year-olds commencing A or AS level courses at schools in England who were no longer pursuing those courses a year later are as follows:

Academic year of commencement of A/AS level course	*Percentage no longer pursuing course one year later* *Per cent.*
1984-85	13·6
1985-86	13·3
1986-87	13·5
1987-88	12·7
1988-89	12·9
1989-90	12·4

Seven-year-olds (Tests)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table of local education authorities whose attainment test results at seven years were published showing in each case *(a)* those who included all seven-year-olds in the tests, *(b)* those who excluded special needs pupils, *(c)* those who excluded statemented or excluded pupils, *(d)* those who excluded pupils with a mother tongue other than English, *(e)* those who excluded other categories of pupil with an indication of which other category was so excluded and *(f)* those who made no return of which categories of pupil were excluded.

Mr. Eggar: With the exception of pupils with statements of special educational needs, and some others temporarily excepted from the provisions of the national curriculum under section 19 of the Education Reform Act, all pupils coming to the end of key stage 1 of the national curriculum were required to be tested in the core subjects last summer.

Some LEAs and schools chose to include pupils with statements of special educational needs in the tests. The reply which I gave to the hon. Member for the City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) on 10 February, *Official Report*, column *374*, explains how the LEA results published on 19 December treated such pupils.

National Curriculum Council

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what financial arrangements were made for the former chairman and chief executive of the National Curriculum Council upon his departure from office last year.

Mr. Eggar: Mr. Duncan Graham received financial compensation of just over £100,000 in respect of loss of income and pension benefits on the early termination of his contract of employment.

Pupil Placements

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many children attend city technology colleges, grant-maintained schools and grammar schools and use the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Eggar *[pursuant to his reply, 10 February 1992, c. 373-74]:* Latest estimates suggest that more than 105,000 pupils now attend grant-maintained schools in England, and that this is expected to rise to some 160,000 next term. Nearly 8,000 pupils are in city technology colleges and in excess of 27,4000 pupils receive support under the assisted places scheme.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Fairs and Promotions

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the cost of the review of the fairs and promotions branch of his Department being carried out by Price Waterhouse.

Mr. Sainsbury: Price Waterhouse is not carrying out a review of my Department's fairs and promotions branch.

Life Cycle Analysis

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advice and assistance his Department offers companies to introduce life cycle analysis in product planning and development.

Mr. Leigh: Life cycle analysis—LCA—is a system for assessing the environmental impact of products at all stages of their life from the winning of raw materials through to the eventual disposal of the product. Although the methodology for assessing these impacts is still developing, many individual companies are turning to LCA to assist them in understanding where the main environmental impacts of their products occur. My officials actively encourage companies in this direction.

My Department has been involved in a number of presentations to business audiences to explain the relationship between LCA and the setting up of an EC-wide official ecolabelling scheme for consumer products. This official scheme will use a "cradle to grave" analysis as the underpinning requirement for assessing the environmental criteria to be applied to products which may attract a label.

RENAVAL

Sir Robin Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how his statement to the House on 17 February, *Official Report*, column 27, about agreement with European Commissioner Bruce Millan affects the RENAVAL programme in Plymouth, and other Devon county council programmes dependent on EEC part-funding including RECHAR.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 21 February 1992]:* I expect the RENAVAL programme now to proceed satisfactorily. Devon is not eligible for RECHAR grants, which are for coalfield areas.

Export Controls

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when his Department next plans to hold seminars on changes to United Kingdom export controls to prevent proliferation; and if he will make a statement on the outcome of the export control seminars his Department sponsored for industry in 1991.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 21 February 1992]:* Five DTI non-proliferation seminars are planned for this year, the first in Manchester on 23 March.

The seminars held last year were well received by industry. I am satisfied that they made a valuable contribution to highlighting awareness about the risks of clandestine procurement activities and explaining export controls.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Criminal Records

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the production in court of the offender's previous criminal record.

Mr. John Patten: We receive representations from time to time on this subject, about which my hon. Friend wrote to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 4 February.

Marriages of Convenience

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department was last notified by the Registrar General that a proposed marriage was purely one of convenience.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On Wednesday 29 January 1992.

Police (Body Armour)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *647*, what is the cost to public funds in providing body armour for police forces.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Police, Hampshire

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the figures for Hampshire police establishment *(a)* police operational duties and *(b)* civilian staff; and what were the figures in 1979.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The present establishment of the Hampshire Constabulary is 3,202 compared to 2,954 in 1979. The establishment will increase to 3,269 from April 1992. It is for the chief constable to decide how available manpower should be deployed. At the end of 1990, 84 per cent. of the force was deployed to operational duties.

My right hon. Friend does not control civilian staff numbers: this is a matter for the police authority. At the end of December 1991 the civilian strength for the Hampshire Constabulary was 1,039, as against 708 in 1979.

Vehicle Test Certificates

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the numbers of prosecutions for using or possessing stolen Ministry of Transport test certificates each year for the last five years by each of the following categories *(a)* heavy goods vehicles, *(b)* public service vehicles and *(c)* private cars.

Mr. John Patten: The information is not available centrally.

Extradition

Mr. Archer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been detained at his request by the police in *(a)* Spain, *(b)* Turkey, *(c)* Zimbabwe, *(d)* the Republic of South Africa and *(e)* all other countries and subsequently flown to the United Kingdom, arrested and remanded into custody for each of the last five years; and whether extradition procedures were followed in each case.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No such requests have been made in the last five years. International co-operation between police forces to apprehend people suspected of criminal offences is a matter for individual chief officers of police.

Charities

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements his Department has to assess proposals for regulations to be made by his Department and their effect on charities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Guidance on this matter, approved by the ministerial group on the voluntary sector, has been issued by the Home Office to all Government Departments. It has been circulated to officials within the Home Office. The guidance is designed to ensure that, when considering changes of policy or changes in procedures, the Home Office, and other Departments, should assess the implications which those changes may have for voluntary organisations and charities.

Sports Grounds

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what response he has made to the report by the Institution of Structural Engineers, "Appraisal of Sports Grounds", a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I was sent a copy of "Appraisal of Sports Grounds" on 30 May 1991. My private secretary replied to the Institution of Structural Engineers on 13 June 1991 to convey my thanks for the report and to relay my congratulations to the institution on producing a document which I regard as an important contribution towards achieving safety at sports grounds.

Football, London

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was received by the Metropolitan police from London Football League clubs in respect of matches called off last season 1990-91 and 1991-92 to date.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the Metropolitan police received £5,316 for matches postponed during the 1990-91 season. To date no payments have been received for the 1991-92 season.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the minimum amount of notice required by the Metropolitan police in respect of Football Association cup and league matches in London.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This is a matter for the Commissioner of the Metropolis. I understand that safety certificates for most London clubs require that the police be notified of fixtures 28 days beforehand. In the case of cup match replays, the police require 10 days notice. The police are sometimes able to accommodate fixtures with less notice, depending on other operational commitments.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total amount received by the Metropolitan police from London's Football League clubs in respect of charges for police services in seasons 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92 to date.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the information is as follows:

Amount received by the Metropolitan police

Season	£
1989-90	2,384,379
1990-91	2,394,469
1991-92[1]	1,051,642

[1] To 20 February.

Wimbledon Tennis Championships

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was received by the Metropolitan police in respect of police services at the 1991 Wimbledon tennis championships.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the Metropolitan police received £172,296·50 for policing the 1991 Wimbledon tennis championships.

Car Crime

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the total number of car-related crimes between 1979 to the present in *(a)* Humberside and *(b)* Scunthorpe divisional police area.

Mr. John Patten: Figures for Humberside are contained in the table.

Figures for Scunthorpe are not available centrally.

Car crimes[1] recorded by the police in Humberside

Year	Number of offences
1979	7,077
1980	7,498
1981	9,168
1982	10,488
1983	9,680
1984	9,462
1985	11,267
1986	13,004
1987	15,298
1988	16,515
1989	17,969
1990	23,060

[1] Theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicle; theft from motor vehicle.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all the television advertising campaigns and all other publicity campaigns costing over £100,000 to be carried out by his Department in February, March, April, May or June of the current year.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My Department is running a car crime prevention campaign on television from 11 February until June. It will be supported by press, poster and radio advertising for shorter spells within that period.

A smoke alarms campaign was run on television from 26 December until 12 February.

An absent voting campaign will be run on television and in the press for three days from the announcement of an election date.

A prison service recruitment campaign has been run in the press from 13 January and will continue until 13 April.

With the exception of absent voting, all Home Office advertising will be suspended for the duration of the general election campaign period.

Political Asylum

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applicants for political asylum, at ports of entry and after entry, since last July to the latest available date, have been *(a)* granted political asylum and *(b)* granted exceptional leave to remain; and what were the figures for the comparable period of 1990-91.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* The readily available information is of total grants of asylum or exceptional leave made in the period July to September 1991. This is shown in the table, along with corresponding information for the same period in 1990.

The figures for July to September 1991 may be an understatement because of delays in recording. Information on decisions made since September 1991 is not yet available.

Grants[1 2 3] of asylum or exceptional leave in the United Kingdom, by the location of application

	Granted asylum			Granted exceptional leave		
	Application made at port	Application made after entry	Total granted asylum	Application made at port	Application made after entry	Total granted exceptional leave
Date of grant						
July to September 1991[4]	15	55	75	30	90	120
July to September 1990	120	80	200	345	220	565

[1] Excluding dependants.
[2] Provisional figures, rounded to the nearest 5.
[3] Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the time period.
[4] 1991 figures are likely to understate because of delays in recording.

Asylum

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number, to the latest available date, of applications for political asylum, from

all sources, awaiting decision; and what were the comparable figures for the comparable period of each of the last three years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* Information is given in the table:

Number of asylum applications[1] outstanding

Date	*Total*
As at:	
31 December 1988	6,500
31 December 1989	10,500
31 December 1990[2]	27,200
30 September 1991 [2,3]	59,300

[1] Estimated figures, excluding dependants.
[2] Provisional figures.
[3] Corresponding information for 31 December 1991 is not yet available.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Rabies

Mr. Hill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans are in place to end rabies quarantine for domestic animals; and what changes in procedure are expected as a result of the European single market.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made towards retaining United Kingdom quarantine regulations until rabies has been eradicated on the continent.

Mr. Maclean: European Community scientific experts have been asked to review the scientific evidence relating to the precautions necessary to avoid the spread of rabies by domestic animals. The Government would not support any proposal for changes to existing arrangements which would increase the risk of rabies being introduced to this country.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in the EC on the elimination of rabies; and what facilities are available to the Commission to confirm the reports given by member states.

Mr. Maclean: I understand that the campaign to eradicate rabies from the European Community is progressing more slowly than the Commission originally expected. It is too early to say whether the campaign will be a complete success. Member states are required to report to the Commission on their plans for control of rabies, which is a compulsorily notifiable disease throughout the Community.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what public statements the chief veterinary officer has made in 1992 about possible developments in EC law affecting United Kingdom quarantine regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Chief Veterinary Officer has explained that the Commission has recently asked the Scientific Veterinary Committee to review the scientific evidence relating to the spread of rabies, in the light of suggestions that some categories of animals that have been vaccinated and blood-tested could represent no greater risk of the introduction of disease than those imported under our existing arrangements. The Government will not support measures which would increase the risk of rabies being introduced into this country.

Dietary Supplements

Mr. Hain: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he intends to support the European Commission view that dietary supplements with a greater strength than that in food should be classified as medicines and sold as such, regardless of whether the manufacturers made medical claims for them;

(2) if he will make a statement about European Community proposals to restrict the availability of dietary supplements and his assessment of the consequences of so doing to both consumers and practitioners.

Mr. Maclean: The European Commission have not issued proposals for legislation on dietary supplements but a discussion paper which presents various options for consideration by member states. One option would be to introduce maximum permitted daily doses for dietary supplements containing certain vitamins and minerals known to be toxic in excess. The Government support this proposal although we have not yet reached a firm view on the limit that would be appropriate for individual substances. The consequences of introducing maximum daily doses would depend on the limits actually set. But in principle such limits would protect consumers by preventing the sale of high dose products to consumers of food although such products would still be available for proper medicinal purposes.

Beef

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the agreements which are currently in place between the United Kingdom and Argentina Governments concerning the import and export of beef between the two countries.

Mr. Gummer: No such agreements exist.

Fur Farming

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the recommendation on fur farming adopted under the 1976 Council of Europe convention on the protection of animals kept for farming purposes was implemented; and what information, advice or instructions have been distributed to British fur factory farmers.

Mr. Maclean: The recommendation on fur farming was adopted in October 1990 and was implemented in October 1991. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food wrote to the Fur Breeders Association in November 1990 informing them of the adoption of the recommendation. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food also advised that officers of the State Veterinary Service would follow the recommendations in future inspections of fur farms.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what changes will be brought about in the living conditions of mink and Arctic foxes on fur farms as a result of implementing the recommendations on fur farming of the Council of Europe convention for the protection of animals kept for farming purposes 1976;

(2) what plans exist to inspect Arctic fox factory farms in Britain to ensure they comply with the recommendations contained in the Council of Europe convention for the protection of animals kept for farming purposes 1976.

Mr. Maclean: The recommendations have no legal force in themselves but it is expected that the European Community will incorporate them in binding legislation. In the meantime State Veterinary Service officers will continue to inspect fur farms and will advise operators to adopt the recommendations. For mink the standards broadly reflect current practices in this country, while for foxes implementation of the standards will lead to welfare improvements particularly through the provision of nesting boxes or platforms. The Community, when considering legislation on this subject, will have the opportunity to lay down more stringent conditions.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which recommendations of the 1976 Council of Europe convention on the protection of animals kept for farming purposes have been implemented by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Maclean: All recommendations are implemented, either by way of regulations or administratively through the issue of guidelines.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all the television advertising campaigns and all other publicity campaigns costing over £100,000 to be carried out by his Department in February, March, April, May or June of the current year.

Mr. Curry: MAFF has no plans to carry out television advertising campaigns during February, March, April, May or June of the current year. An exhibition programme will take consumer information on a wide range of food safety and environmental issues to a number of major venues in England. The revision and distribution of the Department's publications on food will also continue.

Badgers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent advice he has received from his consultative panel on badgers and tuberculosis; if he intends responding publicly to that advice; and if he will place a copy of the advice in the Library.

Mr. Maclean: The work of the consultative panel on badgers and tuberculosis is described in "Bovine Tuberculosis in Badgers" a report published annually by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and placed in the Library of the House. At its most recent meeting, on 13 February, the panel had a preliminary discussion of the feasibility of a control strategy based on the application of a diagnostic test applied to live badgers.

Pollution, Bristol Channel

Mr. Speller: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement upon the measures being taken to reduce the pollution in the Bristol channel caused by the dumping of sewage sludge from the Bristol and Avon area.

Mr. Curry: Regular monitoring shows that there is no evidence of harmful effects from licensed dumping of sewage sludge in the Bristol channel. Nevertheless the two water companies who currently dispose of their sludge there have well developed plans to terminate the operation by the end of 1993.

Pennine Dales

Mr. Hague: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to make changes to the Pennine dales environmentally sensitive area scheme.

Mr. Gummer: As I foreshadowed, I have decided to make changes to the provisions of the Pennine dales environmentally sensitive area scheme which I introduced on 15 January. This scheme was drawn up following extensive local consultations with farmers and conservationists. In the event, there do seem to be better ways of balancing the payments to achieve the envirmental ends. I have sought to maintain a premium payment for hay meadows, now set at £125 per hectare, while increasing the payment for pastures to £90 per hectare. I have also increased the payments for meadows which are managed without fertilisers to enhance their floral diversity to £210 per hectare. The necessary amending Statutory Instrument has today been laid before Parliament. I am sure that these changes will be welcomed by all farmers throughout the extended environmentally sensitive area as well as by the environmental interests. Questions of detailed application of the revised scheme will be addressed in a way which responds to local circumstances.

SCOTLAND

In-patients

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the number of in-patients *(a)* returned to the community in each year since 1985 and *(b)* the planned number to be returned into the community in the current and future years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information for all Scotland is as follows:

Discharges from mental illness hospitals, psychiatric units and mental handicap hospitals by disposal on discharge, years 1985-90

Year	Home alone	Home to relations/ friends	Discharges Hostel for ex-patients	Other hostel/home	Other type of residence	Total
1985	3,729	20,405	207	784	455	25,580
1986	4,992	20,136	305	1,043	425	25,901
1987	4,366	20,669	294	1,067	524	26,920

Year	Home alone	Home to relations/ friends	Discharges Hostel for ex-patients	Other hostel/home	Other type of residence	Total
1988	4,667	21,189	310	1,219	542	27,927
1989	4,970	20,768	293	1,323	507	27,851
1990	5,091	21,308	333	1,567	583	28,882

There is no planned number for current or future years. Each patient is considered on their individual merits and only those patients who would benefit from a community placement are offered such a move.

Dykebar Hospital

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what support services are available for patients from Dykebar hospital, Paisley who have been or will be released into the community; and which agencies he expects to provide each service.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The requirements of each patient will vary depending on their individual needs. Only those patients who are inappropriately placed in hospital and who would benefit from the move will be considered for a community placement. Patients would be offered such a placement only if appropriate support arrangements were in place.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received in relation to the services provided by Dykebar hospital, Paisley.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Since July 1987 I have received only one such representation, relating in that case to laundry services at Dykebar.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with Argyll and Clyde health board regarding the services and facilities provided at Dykebar hospital, Paisley; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None. It is, however, open to the board to raise any issue, at any time as part of the regular meetings and contact that is established to discuss the full range of services and strategic issues.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much *(a)* has been spent, *(b)* is being spent and *(c)* is planned to be spent on the development of Dykebar hospital, Paisley; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A total of £7·4 million has been invested since 1984 to the end of the financial year 1991-92 and a further investment of £2 million is planned within the next three years.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what capital developments are currently taking place at Dykebar hospital, Paisley, and what is the purpose and financial value of each development.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The development of a £1·3 million purpose-built 24-bedded intensive therapy clinic for acutely disturbed patients and the provision of a new £150,000 dispensary are currently underway.

In addition, there are five minor capital developments with a total value of £125,000 which are designed to improve the amenity and facilities for patients in the hospital.

The decentralisation of the hospital boiler plant is currently being planned at an estimated cost of £250,000. This investment will potentially yield an energy efficiency saving of £50,000 per annum.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many in-patients there are currently at Dykebar hospital, Paisley; and what is the projection for the current and future years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: On 11 February this year there were 437 in-patients at Dykebar hospital. The Argyll and Clyde health board expects that level to be maintained for the current year and beyond.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial assistance has been or will be earmarked for local authorities and other agencies to provide support and assistance to patients who have been or will be released into the community from Dykebar hospital, Paisley.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is for the Argyll and Clyde health board, the local authorities and other agencies to determine from within the financial and other resources available to them what level of provision is appropriate to the needs of any patients transferring from Dykebar hospital.

I announced on 18 November last that funds available to local authorities under the mental illness specific grant scheme would double for 1992-93 to £6 million. I have also recently announced that £33 million in total will be available during the period 1991-92 to 1994-95 under the bridging finance scheme to assist their programmes of care in the community. Of this, some £2·26 million has been allocated to Argyll and Clyde health board and it has been invited to submit bids for a further allocation.

These decisions underline the Government's main aim of improving the quality of life for the mentally ill and their carers and our commitment to assisting health boards and local authorities in providing facilities in the community to reduce the number of people inappropriately placed in hospital.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for the long-term future of Dykebar hospital, Paisley; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Such matters fall entirely for consideration by the Argyll and Clyde health board.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to dispose of land or assets associated with Dykebar hospital, Paisley; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are no current plans to dispose of land or assets associated with Dykebar hospital, other than a small strip of roadway which was not required for health service purposes, and over which the health board will retain a right of access.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to review the services and facilities provided at Dykebar hospital, Paisley; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is for Argyll and Clyde health board to review continuously the needs of the population that it services and how to meet these. The managers and clinicians at Dykebar hospital should also consider regularly how its services can be improved and should discuss that with the board.

Patients (Relocation)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to relocate patients from the state hospital at Carstairs to Dykebar hospital in Paisley; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The suitability of patients for transfer out of the state hospital following treatment is a matter for agreement between the clinicians at the state hospital and those of the referring health board.

Economy (Paisley)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to regenerate the economy of the Paisley post code area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Government's main instrument for economic development, environmental improvement and training in the Paisley area is the Renfrewshire enterprise company. The company has a range of powers available to it and will continue to fulfil these functions. Renfrewshire Enterprise's budget of £24·7 million for 1991-92 is substantial, and makes it well placed to respond to opportunities within the local economy.

In addition, the Ferguslie Park partnership in Paisley is implementing an agreed strategy for the comprehensive long-term regeneration of the area.

Elderslie Hospital

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to dispose of or acquire any land or assets in relation to Elderslie hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are no current plans to either dispose or of acquire land or assets in connection with Elderslie hospital.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what services are provided in or from Elderslie hospital; what plans he has for the development of services at Elderslie hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Elderslie hospital provides 10 continuing care places for young adults, and eight respite care places for children, with a mental handicap. The services provided include medical and nursing care and paramilitary input where appropriate. There are also links with community mental handicap nursing staff.

As part of its continuing review of service provision, Argyll and Clyde health board is considering how best to improve the facilities and care at the hospital.

Argyll and Clyde Health Board

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial support has been earmarked for Argyll and Clyde health board to provide support and assistance to patients who have been or will be released into the community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is for Argyll and Clyde health board to determine from within the overall resources available to it what financial and other support should be made for the health care of those patients who would benefit from a community placement.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to visit Paisley, Johnstone or Elderslie to discuss the economic, housing and social problems; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Secretary of State has no immediate plans to visit Paisley, Johnstone or Elderslie. His last visit to Paisley was on 4 October 1991 to launch the Glencoats area development, a major joint venture housing initiative associated with the Ferguslie Park partnership.

SSSIs

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many sites of special scientific interest are currently designated in Scotland; what means exist to monitor loss and damage to sites of special scientific interest in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A total of 1,342 sites of special scientific interest have been notified in Scotland. Site monitoring, using standard recording techniques, is undertaken by local staff of the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland. Site visits are the usual method, but other techniques such as overflying or comparative air photography may also be used when appropriate. In addition sites may be the subject of specific monitoring projects; examples include research into the effects of skiing, overgrazing on moorland and the acidification of lochs.

Constituencies

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the acreage of each of the six geographically largest parliamentary constituencies in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The areas by hectares of each of the six geographically largest parliamentary constituencies in Scotland are as follows in descending order:

Parliamentary constituency	*Area by hectares*
Ross, Cromarty and Skye	954,680
Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber	870,708
Caithness and Sutherland	788,297
Argyll and Bute	661,362
North Tayside	485,104
Galloway and Upper Nithsdale	441,883

Housing Valuations, Borders

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the district valuer's valuation for houses in each of the areas in the borders proposed to be sold by Scottish Homes to the Waverley housing trust.

Mr. Lang: I am considering the terms of the sale proposed by Scottish Homes to Waverley housing trust. Details such as the district valuer's valuations will be made available when I announce my decision.

NHS Trusts

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which hospitals within the Renfrew district area of Argyll and Clyde health board have applied for trust status; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No applications for NHS trust status have been received from within the Argyll and Clyde health board area. However, given the benefits to patients which are now clearly emerging from existing operational trusts, I would expect those charged with health care in Renfrew district, as elsewhere, would wish to examine the matter very carefully.

Spanish Customs Officers

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what assessment has been made on the impact on the Scottish fishing industry of the interruption of supplies bound for the Spanish market as a result of planned industrial action by Spanish customs officers;

(2) what discussions he has had with the Scottish Fish Merchants Association on [illegible]nned industrial action by Spanish customs officers.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Spanish market is a very important outlet for Scottish fish and shellfish and it would be of some concern if the trade with Spain were to be disrupted. For the moment, industrial action by Spanish customs agents appears to be sporadic with notice of their intentions being given in advance. As yet there have been no representations from Scottish fish processing sources on the matter. We are continuing to monitor the situation.

Food Hygiene

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the likely timetable for the introduction of amendments to the Food Hygiene (Scotland) Regulations 1959.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) on 21 February 1992.

Repossession Orders

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many orders for repossession of houses there were in each sheriff court area in Scotland for 1979, 1990 and 1991.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* Information on orders for repossession of houses is included in the returns relating to all actions involving land or heritable estate which are supplied to the courts for the purposes of the Judicial Statistics (Scotland) Act 1869 and cannot be identified separately.

DEFENCE

Atomic Energy Authority, Harwell

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) from which subheads of which votes funds for his Department's contracts with the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority establishment at Harwell are taken;

(2) what contracts his Department has with the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority establishment at Harwell; what are the purposes of these contracts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Atomic Weapons Establishment has a number of contracts which utilise the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's expertise in the fields of nuclear waste treatment, plutonium handling, safety studies, materials analysis and equipment testing and calibration. Funding for these contracts is provided from class 1, defence vote 2—defence procurement. It would not be in the national interest to reveal further details of the funding arrangements.

Nuclear-Powered Warship Safety Committee

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the terms of reference of the nuclear-powered warship safety committee.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The terms of reference are to advise the Secretary of State for Defence and other Ministers on all public safety matters associated with the construction, operation and maintenance of nuclear-powered warships.

Procurement

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements his Department has to assess the effect of proposed changes of regulations relating to the defence procurement programme on supplier companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: My Department is unaware of any proposals for such changes that would affect supplier companies.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all the television advertising campaigns and all other publicity campaigns costing over £100,000 to be carried out by his Department in February, March, April, May or June of the current year.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

Royal Navy/Royal Marines

1. Press campaign to recruit RN/RM officers—February/March 1992.
2. Press campaign to recruit specialist RN officer categories—February/March 1992.

(This is in place of the cinema campaign mentioned in my answer of 8 November 1991, at column 297.)

Territorial Army

1. Combined TV and press recruiting campaign—January/March 1992.

Northern Ireland

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the involvement of military forces in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The armed forces are in Northern Ireland acting in support of the Royal Ulster Constabulary to defeat terrorism. We are determined to defeat terrorism within the rule of the law.

Housing Task Force

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the housing task force to report.

Mr. Tom King: The housing task force, under the chairmanship of my noble Friend the Earl of Arran, was required to look radically at housing for the services. This it has done and it has now reported to me with proposals for the immediate future, and the medium and longer term. It has undertaken a major task in a short time and I pay tribute to the contribution made by its members, including those from the private sector, the service charities and the voluntary housing sector. I have placed in the Library a note describing the actions that are being taken in the light of its recommendations. Separately, I have placed a note in the Library setting out a number of improvements to provision for resettlement advice and support for the services.

ENERGY

Renewable Energy

14. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what initiatives he is taking to assist local authorities in the development of renewable energy sources.

Mr. Moynihan: The Department of Energy is supporting a series of pilot studies to assist local authorities to identify the renewable energy potential in their area and to explore the associated planning and environmental issues. The first two studies are taking place in Cumbria and Devon.

20. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what new plans he has to increase electricity production from renewable sources.

Mr. Moynihan: The non-fossil fuel obligation will continue to bring forward additional renewables-sourced generating capacity. Meanwhile, I am reviewing my Department's renewable energy strategy.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what arrangements his Department has to assess the effect of new rules and regulations proposed by his Department which would affect small firms engaged in renewable energy projects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Proposed new regulations are subject to a compliance cost assessment, which would include consideration of the effect on business. The departmental deregulation unit regularly surveys the scope for reducing burdens on business. However, at present I have no proposals to introduce new rules or regulations which would affect small firms engaged in renewable energy projects.

United Kingdom Continental Shelf

19. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the level of gas production on the United Kingdom continental shelf in 1990.

Mr. Moynihan: In 1990, 50 billion cubic metres of gas were produced from the United Kingdom continental shelf. My Department's provisional estimate is that the level of production rose by over 10 per cent. in 1991.

Petroleum Act 1987

21. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any proposals to modify the Petroleum Act 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: As far as the abandonment provisions of the Petroleum Act 1987 are concerned, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave him on 9 December 1991 at column *335*. In addition, the Offshore Safety Bill makes provision for those powers in the Petroleum Act which relate to the establishment of safety zones to be made an "existing statutory provision" of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. There are no other plans to modify the Petroleum Act.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

22. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the level of carbon dioxide emissions produced as a result of energy use in the home; and if he will make a statement.

24. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the level of carbon dioxide emissions produced as a result of energy use in the home.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is estimated that in 1990 the domestic sector emitted some 150 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (or 40 million tonnes of carbon). This represents about a quarter of total emissions. These figures take into account the domestic sector's estimated share of emissions from the electricity supply industry.

Energy Prices

23. **Sir Anthony Durant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy by how much the level of prices for fuel, light and power has changed in real terms since 1986.

Mr. Moynihan: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) earlier today.

Coal Task Force

25. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he is in a position to respond to the report of the coal task force.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Our response to the report by the task force on coal research and development issues will be published in due course.

Coal Industry (Industrial Disputes)

26. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the level of production lost through industrial disputes in the coal industry in *(a)* 1980-81, *(b)* 1986-87 and *(c)* 1990-91.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Saleable tonnage lost as a result of industrial disputes for the years quoted are as follows:

	Million tonnes
1980-81	1·5
1986-87	1·0
1990-91	0·2

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many days were lost through strikes in the coal industry in 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: This Department does not collect information of this nature. British Coal, however, records saleable tonnage lost as a result of disputes in its annual report, and the latest figures are:

	Million tonnes
1978-79	1·5
1982-83	3·6
1986-87	1·0
1990-91	0·2

Electricity

27. **Mr. Andrew Hargreaves:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy by how much domestic electricity prices rose *(a)* between 1974 and 1979 and *(b)* since 1984.

Mr. Wakeham: Between 1974 and 1979 domestic electricity prices rose by 16 per cent. in real terms (an increase of 147 per cent. in cash terms). Between 1984 and 1991 they fell by five per cent. in real terms (an increase of 41 per cent. in cash terms).

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list all the applications under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, stating for each application whether it was granted, refused, or is outstanding; and whether it has gone to a public inquiry.

Mr. Wakeham: The applications made under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 are as listed.

Site	*Applicant*	*Proposals*	*Status*
Hinkley Point "C"	Nuclear Electric	1,200 MW PWR	Consent given 6 September 1990
Killingholme "A"	National Power	1,020 MW combined cycle gas turbine station (CCGT)	Consent given 17 April 1990
Little Barford	National Power	680 MW CCGT	Consent given 5 February 1991
Rye House	PowerGen	560-680 MW CCGT	Consent given 19 December 1990
Sutton Bridge	Electricity System Industry	60 MW coal-fired station	Withdrawn
Ratcliffe on Soar	PowerGen	Installation of FGD	Consent given 27 March 1991
Ferrybridge "C"	PowerGen	Installation of FGD	Under consideration
Wilton	Teesside Power Ltd.	1,725 MW CCGT	Consent given 5 November 1990.
Deeside	Deeside Power Development Company Ltd.	450 MW CCGT	Consent given 15 November 1990. A new application to increase the output to 500 MW has been received and is under consideration
Drax	National Power	New ash disposal facilities	Under consideration
Keadby	Energy Resources Ltd.	720 MW CCGT	Consent given 4 March 1991
Plymouth	PowerGen	350-450 MW CCGT	Under consideration
Staythorpe "C"	National Power	1,500 MW CCGT	Awaiting report of public inquiry
Angle Bay	Texaco Ltd.	1,100 or 1,280 MW CCGT	Consent given 9 September 1991
Didcot "B"	National Power	1,500 MW CCGT	Awaiting report of public inquiry
Ryedale	Kelt UK Ltd.	50-60 MW open cycle gas turbine station	Awaiting report of public inquiry
Coryton	Coryton Cogen Ltd.	460 MW CCGT	Consent given 4 July 1991
Barking	Barking Power Ltd.	1000 MW CCGT	Consent given 11 February 1992
Rugby	Rugby Power Company Ltd.	380 MW CCGT	Withdrawn
Blyth	National Power	New ash disposal facilities	Consent given 3 February 1992
Killingholme "PowerGen"	PowerGen	Cooling water works	Withdrawn
Belvedere	Cory Environmental Ltd.	126 MW station fuelled by refuse	Under consideration
Ardleigh	Eastern Generation Ltd.	380 MW CCGT	Under consideration
Medway	Medway Power Ltd.	660 MW CCGT	Under consideration
King's Lynn	Energy Supply Company Ltd.	118 MW CCGT	Consent given 14 January 1992
Stallingborough	Humber Power Ltd.	1,100 MW CCGT	Under consideration
Dungeness	Nuclear Electric	New low level waste handling facility	Under consideration
West Burton	National Power	New ash disposal facility	Under consideration
Pembroke	National Power	Fitting of new dust control equipment	Under consideration
Connah's Quay	PowerGen	1,350 MW CCGT	Under consideration
Shoreham	South Coast Power Ltd.	450 MW CCGT	Under consideration
Oldbury-on-Severn	Nuclear Electric	Installation of a silt lagoon	Under consideration
Charterhouse Street, London EC1	Citigen Ltd.	90 MW station fuelled by gas and fuel oil	Under consideration
Spondon	Courtaulds	318 MW CCGT	Under consideration
Seabank	Seabank Power Ltd.	1,212 MW CCGT	Under consideration
Greenwich	MetroPower Ltd.	370 MW CCGT	Under consideration
Sutton Bridge	Independent Power Generators Ltd.	700 MW CCGT	Under consideration
Trafford, Manchester	Electricity System Industry Ltd.	680 MW CCGT	Under consideration
King's Lynn	Eastern Generation Ltd.	380 MW CCGT	Under consideration

Citizens Charter

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairmen of the regional electricity companies to discuss the citizens charter.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet chairmen of the regional electricity companies from time to time to discuss a range of issues.

Severn Barrage

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will report progress on the Severn barrage project.

Mr. Moynihan: A £50,000 preliminary financing study for the barrage has just been agreed, in addition to the existing environmental and energy capture studies costing £940,000.

Verification Technology

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether his Department received any invitation to *(a)* attend, *(b)* participate in or *(c)* present a paper on radioisotope monitoring at the Joint Verification Technology Information Centre/Royal Astronomical Society discussion meeting on nuclear verification being held at the Geological Society on 14 February.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No.

Photovoltaic Research

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what funding his Department has provided into photovoltaic research for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Moynihan: On 8 May 1991 I announced that the Government would fund a £250,000 programme of research into photovoltaics. It is expected that expenditure in FY1991/92 will amount to about £60,000. Prior to my announcement, the Department's renewable programme undertook an investigation into photovoltaics costing about £40,000, and the report was published in 1990 as ETSU-R-50, "Review of Photovoltaic Power Technology". Between FY1981/82 and FY1990/91, the solar element of the renewables programme was directed primarily at passive solar design, rather than photovoltaics, with expenditure rising from £0·7 million to £2·1 million during that period.

Oil

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how much oil is refined per head of population in each Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country and member state of the European Community.

Mr. Moynihan: In 1990, the latest year for which data are available, the amount of oil refined per head of population in OECD countries and member states of the European Community was as follows;

Country	*Tonnes of refined oil per head of population*
Australia	1·75
Austria	1·16
Belgium[1]	2·96
Canada	3·16
Denmark[1]	1·54
Finland	2·10
France[1]	1·40
Germany[1]	1·71
Greece[1]	1·63
Iceland	Nil
Ireland[1]	0·50
Italy[1]	1·58
Japan	1·41
Luxembourg[1]	Nil
Netherlands[1]	4·74
New Zealand	1·38
Norway	3·10
Portugal[1]	1·06
Spain[1]	1·42
Sweden	2·05
Switzerland	0·45
Turkey	0·40
United Kingdom[1]	1·54
United States	2·92

[1] Member states of the European Community.
NB Germany refers to the (former) Federal Republic of Germany.
Source: Population—OECD Main Economic Indicators.
Source: Oil data—International Energy Agency.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of United Kingdom oil is refined within Wales; and how much this is per head of population.

Mr. Moynihan: In 1990, 19·7 per cent. of United Kingdom oil was refined in Wales. The amount of oil refined per head of population in Wales in 1990 was 6·06 tonnes.

International Atomic Energy Agency

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what information he has regarding the annual budget of the International Atomic Energy Agency for safeguards and other purposes for each year since 1979;

(2) what has been the annual contribution in financial terms to the International Atomic Energy Agency for each year since 1979; and what non-financial assistance has been given.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Details of all these are given in the International Atomic Energy Agency's annual accounts. I am making arrangements for copies of the accounts to be deposited in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy from which countries radioactive and toxic waste was treated at the nuclear re-processing plant at Sellafield in Cumbria from 1 April 1991 to 31 December 1991; and what methods of transportation were used.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Neither radioactive nor toxic waste is imported for treatment at Sellafield. During the period mentioned by the hon. Member, spent nuclear fuel from Italy and Japan was reprocessed to recover the uranium and plutonium for possible recycling. The fuel in question was transported by sea and rail. The arrangements were subject to the stringent requirements laid down by the appropriate national and international regulations. Fuel from United Kingdom customers was also reprocessed at Sellafield during the period.

Libya

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has received the report of the outcome of the visit of the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency to Libya on 2 February.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The International Atomic Energy Agency has made a report in the form of a press release on this visit. A copy of the press release has been placed in the Library of the House.

Balance of Trade (Fuels)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the balance of trade in fuels in 1991.

Mr. Wakeham: In 1991 the United Kingdom had a trading surplus in fuels worth £104 million.

Coal Imports

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the volume of coal which will be imported into the United Kingdom during 1992 and in each of the next three years; and what proportion he expects imported coal to be of the total tonnage consumed in each of those years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We do not make such estimates.

Privatisations

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the amount of electricity and gas saved since privatisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In the electricity industry, competition has created an incentive on generators to reduce their fuel costs and an incentive on customers to manage their demand. As a result, the National Grid Company has noted evidence that high peak demands are now being managed more effectively, and older, inefficient plant is being closed down.

The Government are taking steps in the Utilities Bill to open up the gas market to wider competition, which will encourage a further focusing on costs by supplier and consumer as they evaluate the new options open to them.

British Gas and the regional electricity companies have also introduced initiatives to encourage their customers to use energy more efficiently, such as advisory services, Codes of Practice, competitions for industrial and commercial consumers, and appliance labelling. In addition, the Government have welcomed OFGAS' intention to incorporate into the gas tariff an "E factor" which would allow British Gas to pass on costs of energy efficiency programmes to consumers, and also the consultation document from OFFER on energy efficiency in the electricity industry.

Greenwich Power Station

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will take into account the impact on the water quality and fish stocks of the Thames when considering whether to approve the application from MetroPower Ltd., to reconstruct the Greenwich power station.

Mr. Wakeham: I am obliged, when considering an application made under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, to take into account the environmental effects before deciding whether to grant my consent to an application.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will take into account the reports by Greenwich environmental health department and by the director of public health for Bexley on the rate of respiratory diseases among the population of Greenwich when considering whether to approve the application from MetroPower Ltd., to reconstruct the Greenwich power station.

Mr. Wakeham: I have not received either of the reports. Greenwich borough council, which is the relevant planning authority, has yet to give me its views. It is a matter for the council whether to include these reports when submitting its views to me.

Offshore Installations

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) in relation to the relevant provisions contained in the Petroleum Act 1987, if he will list the offshore installations and pipeline networks which have been dismantled and removed or those which are to be demolished and withdrawn from their sites on the United Kingdom continental shelf; and if he will make a statement;

(2) in relation to the relevant provisions contained in the Petroleum Act 1987, how many programmes involving the abandonment of *(a)* offshore installations and *(b)* submarine pipe line networks he has approved over the past three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Over the past three years my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy has approved two abandonment programmes under the terms of the Petroleum Act 1987, relating to the Crawford (block 9/28a) and Blair (block 16/21a) fields. On the Crawford field all installations and pipelines have been dismantled and removed from the United Kingdom continental shelf. They comprised:

—The North Sea Pioneer floating production system.
—The Hamilton 2 CALM loading buoy.
—Subsea facilities, including flexible pipelines and control lines.

On the Blair field, the single production wellhead has been dismantled and removed; two small partially trenched pipelines have been left in place after cleaning and, to prevent interference with fishing vessels, have been covered with concrete mattresses where they were not trenched. Approval of the abandonment programme was subject to conditions requiring inspection and maintenance of these pipelines.

No other installations or pipelines have been dismantled and removed. The Piper Alpha installation was toppled in situ in 1989 as it was not safe or practicable to abandon it by other means.

The Government have made clear that each abandonment programme submitted under the terms of the Petroleum Act 1987 will be considered on its merits, in the light of all the circumstances prevailing at the time, and taking full account of environmental and fishing interests. The standards taken into account when a decision is made regarding the removal of disused offshore installations and structures will be consistent with the guidelines adopted by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). Application of the IMO guidelines means that the majority of platforms on the UKCS will be entirely removed.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list all the television advertising campaigns and all other publicity campaigns costing over £100,000 to be carried out by his Department in February, March, April, May, or June of the current year.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department has a continuing programme of publicity to promote energy efficiency, the United Kingdom offshore supplies industry and renewable sources of energy. Within the energy efficiency programme, both the joint campaign with the Department of the Environment on the environment and home energy efficiency and the "Making a Corporate Commitment" campaign will cost over £100,000 between February and June this year. No television advertising is envisaged during this period.

Wind Power

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he holds on plans by electricity companies to extend wind power facilities; if he will list the sites that are under consideration for the development of wind farms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Information is held by the Department of Energy on plans by the electricity companies to extend wind power facilities through registration of these schemes under the non-fossil fuel obligation. In the tranches of NFFO announced to date, only three projects (out of 57) have been registered by an electricity company. These are:

Carmarthen bay	National Power
Richborough	PowerGen
Cold Northcott	National Power

Full lists of sites that have contracted for wind projects under the NFFO are in the Library of the House. Other plans for new wind power facilities are a matter for the companies concerned.

Employment Survey

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what meetings he has had with representatives of the oil industry, the oil industry trade unions and the police services in connection with his Department's oil and gas facilities employment survey; what are the objectives of this survey; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Officials from my Department meet regularly with the relevant representatives of the oil industry and security agencies to discuss this and other wider security issues.

It is Government policy to carry out a counter-terrorist check on anyone who is going to be allowed to be unescorted in or on an installation of national importance. The Government would be failing in their duty if they did not take appropriate measures to protect these installations and the work force from deliberate man-made or accidental disasters.

Power Stations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list all the power stations in England and Wales of 300 MW or over which are located in residential areas.

Mr. Wakeham: The table lists those powers stations currently operating in England and Wales of 300 MW or over, with the name of the county in which each is situated. My Department's records do not show which, if any, are located in residential areas: these stations were in many cases constructed many years ago, so that records relating to the grant of consent would not give the information requested.

National Power plc

Power station	*Location*
Willington "A"	Derbyshire
Blyth "A"	Northumberland
Staythorpe	Nottinghamshire
Aberthaw "A"	South Glamorgan
Skelton Grange	Yorkshire
Rugeley "A"	Staffordshire
Uskmouth	Gwent
Willington "B"	Derbyshire
West Thurrock	Essex
Blyth "B"	Northumberland
Thorpe Marsh	South Yorkshire
West Burton	Nottinghamshire
Eggborough	North Humberside
Tilbury	Essex
Fawley	Hampshire
Ironbridge	Shropshire
Pembroke	Dyfed
Aberthaw "B"	South Glamorgan
Rugeley "B"	Staffordshire
Didcot	Oxfordshire
Drax	North Yorkshire
Littlebrook	Kent

PowerGen plc

Power station	*Location*
Hams Hall	Warwickshire
Castle Donington	Derbyshire
Drakelow "B"	Derbyshire
High Marnham	Nottinghamshire
Richborough	Kent
Drakelow "C"	Derbyshire
Ferrybridge "C"	West Yorkshire
Ratcliffe	Nottinghamshire
Cottam	Nottinghamshire
Kingsnorth	Kent
Fiddler's Ferry	Cheshire
Grain	Kent
Ince	Cheshire

Nuclear Electric

Power station	*Location*
Dungeness "A"	Kent
Hinkley Point "A"	Somerset
Oldbury	Avon
Sizewell "A"	Suffolk
Transfynydd	Gwynydd
Wylfa	Gwynydd
Dungeness "B"	Kent
Hartlepool	Cleveland
Heysham 1	Lancashire
Heysham 2	Lancashire
Hinkley Point "B"	Somerset

ENVIRONMENT

Projects, Stockton

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources and projects have been directed to the Blue Hall, Ragworth, Portrack and Tilery areas of Stockton-on-Tees in each year since 1980.

Mr. Key: The table provides details of approved expenditure under the urban programme and estate action since 1987-88.

	£
1987-88	
Urban Programme	
Portrack/Tilery	
Landscaping Portrack	22,000
Black Path Park	50,000
Riverside Landscaping	36,000
Blue Hall	
Blue Hall Housing Centre	152,000
1988-89	
Urban Programme	
Portrack/Tilery	
Portrack Landscape Master Plan	2,000
Security/Environmental Grants	50,000
Blue Hall	
Health Visiting Project	52,000
1989-90	
Urban Programme	
Portrack/Tilery	
All Weather Playing Surface	176,000
Security/Environmental Grants	50,000
Green Dragon Museum Enhancement	56,000
Portrack Lane Shops	29,000
Blue Hall	
Blue Hall Street Lighting Improvements	84,000
Blue Hall Catering	22,400
1990-91	
Urban Programme	
Portrack/Tilery	
High Street Commercial Improvement Zone	35,090
Norton Road Commercial Improvement Zone	75,000
Townscape Works	8,000
Security/Environmental Grants	70,000
Blue Hall	
Tenants Participation	31,000
St. Michael After School	116,000
New Blue Hall Community Project	62,000
Blue Hall/Ragworth	
Conservation Work in the Community	115,000
Health Needs	5,500
Estate Action	
Portrack Flats	250,000
1991-92	
Urban Programme	
Portrack/Tilery	
High Street Commercial Improvement Zone	50,000
Norton Road Commercial Improvement Zone	50,000
Ext. Improvements to Key Building	70,000
One Stop Advice Centre	300,000
Tenants Management Co-op	71,000
Portrack Flats Concierge Wardens	135,000
Victoria Estate Landscaping	134,800
Blue Hall	
Prevent Unwanted Pets	5,000
Ragworth	
Ragworth Community Centre	249,000
Estate Action	
Portrack Flats	275,000
Energy Efficiency Scheme	
Ragworth Estate	190,000

Note: These figures do not cover local authority expenditure in these areas from the housing investment programme and other capital programmes.

Information regarding investment prior to 1987 is not available in the form requested. Stockton on Tees BC became an urban programme authority in 1987. The estate action programme commenced in 1986.

Dioxins

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the calculations and data upon which figure 2, Food Surveillance Paper No. 31, "Estimated relative contribution to total TCDD released into the atmosphere from sources of dioxins and furans in the United Kingdom" is based.

Mr. Trippier: Figure 2 in Food Surveillance Paper 31, "Dioxins in Food" is taken from information in Chapter 3 of the Department of the Environment's Pollution Paper 27, "Dioxins in the Environment" published in 1989. The figure shows the estimated relative combined contributions from both known combustion sources and other sources, such as manufacture, processing and use of chlorinated aromatic and other chemicals and chlorine bleached materials and metallurgical processes. It thus refers to releases to the environment, not just atmosphere.

Unfortunately an arithmetical error has affected the numbers shown in Figure 2, although not the relative importance given to each source. The correct figures taken from Pollution Paper 27 are given in the table. I would stress, however, that the figures are relatively crude estimates although based on the best information available at the time.

Source	*Relative contribution per cent.*	*per cent.*	*Estimated quantity released into the environment each year, g TCDD*[1]
Municipal incinerators	20·00		1,500
Domestic coal fires	11·00		800
Vehicle exhausts	7·00		500
Coal-fired industrial plant and power stations	5·00		200 coal-fired industrial plant 160 coal-fired power stations
Chemical incinerators	0·06		a few grams
Hospital incinerators	0·40		30
Other sources: fires, metallurgical processes, etc	26·40	6·4	6 Cigarettes 450 Stubble burning 13 Accidental fires

Source	Relative contribution per cent.	per cent.	Estimated quantity released into the environment each year, g TCDD[1]
Manufacturer and use of organic chemicals	30	20	metallurgical processes etc.

[1] Figures from Pollution Paper 27, Dioxins in the Environment.

Child Refugees

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what financial support his Department is providing to West Sussex local authorities for the care of child refugees who arrived at Gatwick airport.

Mr. Key: I have been asked to reply. Support for local authorities' revenue expenditure is provided through revenue support grant; authorities in West Sussex will receive a total of £149·739 million in this way in 1992-93. The grant is not hypothecated to particular local services.

Council Vacancies

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to require the chairman of a parish or town council to advise each member of the council of a vacancy for a councillor.

Mr. Portillo: I have been asked to reply.

A parish council must give immediate public notice of a vacancy by posting a notice in some conspicuous place or places within its area. I have no plans to add to that requirement.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reductions or remissions in liability for non-domestic rates have been made by local authorities using their powers under section 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

Mr. Key: Local authorities in England used their powers under section 49 of the 1988 Act to reduce rates bills in 1990-91 by a total of £23,582.

Departmental Annual Report

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many copies of his departmental annual report 1992 have been printed; at what cost; and what arrangements have been made for distribution of the report.

Mr. Heseltine: A total of 3,800 copies of the Department of the Environment 1992 annual report were printed. The costs of printing, publishing and distribution are borne by HMSO which aims to recover its costs from sales revenue. Copies of the report are available from all HMSO bookshops and agents and from HMSO's distribution centre by mail or telephone order.

Visitor Statistics

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how the statistics relating to *(a)* visitor bed nights and *(b)* day visitors are compiled for the purpose of preparing standard spending assessments in English resort towns.

Mr. Key: Details are given on page 14 of the The Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) (No. 2) Report (England) which is in the Library. No allowance is made in SSAs at present for day visitors; there is no consistent and reliable source of this information for all authorities.

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what dates the statistics relating to visitor bed nights were collected in 1990-91.

Mr. Key: The allowance for overnight visitors within the All Other Services element of standard spending assessments has been updated for 1992-93. It is now based on information from a number of sources: the British Home Tourism Surveys (1980 to 1984), the British Tourism Surveys (1987 and 1988) and the United Kingdom Tourism Survey (UKTS) (1989) for domestic visitors. It is the intention to incorporate in future years information from the UKTS for 1990 and 1991.

Urban Development, Gosforth

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has yet received a further application from Newcastle upon Tyne city council for permission to develop the Rectory road allotments, south Gosforth; and whether he will undertake to consult the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central on any such application.

Mr. Yeo: I understand that Newcastle upon Tyne city council will be submitting an application shortly for consent to dispose of the Rectory road allotments, south Gosforth. Any representations which the hon. Member wishes to make on his own or his constituents' behalf will be taken into account when the application is decided.

BCCI

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give local authorities credit approval to cover Bank of Credit and Commerce International debts.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) on 18 February at column *76*. Any further applications will be considered on their merits.

Disabled Council Tenants

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from Manchester city council for a supplementary allocation to the housing investment programme for adaptations to the homes of disabled council tenants; what reply he is sending; what action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The Secretary of State has received a letter on this subject from the chair of the housing committee of Manchester city council. I have replied today and will place a copy of my response in the Library.

Waste Discharges (River Mersey)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the number of consents to companies to discharge waste in the River Mersey issued for each year since 1979;

(2) if he will list the number of prosecutions brought together with the number of convictions secured for polluting the River Mersey for each year since 1979.

Mr. Baldry: I understand that information on numbers of discharge consents, or on prosecutions or convictions, is not held centrally by the NRA in respect of individual rivers.

CITES

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who will be attending the Conference in Trade on Endangered Species meeting in Japan on 2 March as representatives of Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Baldry: I shall attend the meeting from 9 to 13 March. From 2 March the United Kingdom will also be represented by three officials from the Department, two officials from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and one from each of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Three members of the Hong Kong Conference in Trade on Endangered Species Management Authority will also be on the United Kingdom delegation.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if Her Majesty's Government will resist any attempts to re-open world trade in leopard skins, cheetah skins, black rhino and elephant products due to be discussed at the Conference in Trade on Endangered Species meeting in Japan on 2 March.

Mr. Baldry: On the question of elephants, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) on 19 February 1992, *Official Report*, column *202*. The Government are also opposed to any action that could re-open trade in products from rhinoceroses, cheetahs and leopards.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the annual loss of rents and community charge on the vacant properties in the public and private sector in Liverpool during the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Information about rent loss from vacant local authority dwellings is collected on housing revenue account subsidy claim forms submitted by local authorities to the Department. Liverpool city council's mid-year claim form for 1991-92 shows the following estimates:

rent loss on vacant local authority dwellings in 1990-91, £5,111,100

rent loss on vacant local authority dwellings in 1991-92, £6,428,400

The Department does not collect information about rent loss on vacant dwellings in the private sector, nor about losses in respect of community charges on vacant dwellings.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will direct Liverpool city council to refund the cost of wrongfully issued summonses to community charge payers who have paid their bills.

Mr. Key: A community chargepayer becomes liable to pay costs only when a liability order has been grated against him by a magistrates' court. In the case of a wrongful summons, it would be the local authority who would bear the cost of the abortive work.

Housing Investment, Coventry

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the level of the housing investment programme allocation awarded to Coventry in each financial year since 1978-79; and what the damages amounted to in real terms.

Mr. Yeo: Housing investment programme (HIP) allocation and gross capital expenditure figures are as follows:

£ thousands

	HIP allocation		*Gross expenditure*[1]	
	cash value	*at 1991-92 prices*	*cash value*	*at 1991-92 prices*
1978-79	12,225	33,164	12,020	32,608
1979-80	13,736	31,937	15,591	36,249
1980-81	10,551	20,731	9,832	19,318
1981-82	7,679	13,759	9,236	16,549
1982-83	12,247	20,485	13,436	22,474
1983-84	8,070	12,901	9,973	15,943
1984-85	8,941	13,612	11,148	16,972
1985-86	7,707	11,120	18,674	26,943
1986-87	8,288	11,577	14,794	20,665
1987-88	8,276	10,964	15,428	20,439
1988-89	8,990	11,112	19,507	24,112
1989-90	7,381	8,568	22,482	26,097
New capital finance system[2]				
1990-91	9,820	10,507	11,702	12,521
[3]1991-92	9,715	9,715	not available	

[1] Since 1981-82 local authorities have been able to augment the borrowing power of their HIP allocations by using the prescribed proportion of their capital receipts.

[2] From 1990-91, under the new capital finance system, the HIP allocation does not convey borrowing approval directly. The allocation totals are the HIP allocation plus supplementary credit approvals for housing projects.

[3] Provisional estimate of final allocation.

An initial HIP allocation of £10·2 million—£9·7 million at 1991-92 prices—has been issued for 1992-93 and additional resources—supplementary credit approvals—may be allocated later.

Leeds Development Corporation

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 11 February *Official Report*, columns *430-31* if he will set out the basis of calculation of the employment statistics for the area covered by the Leeds development corporation.

Mr. Key: The employment figures are provided annually as at 1 April by economic consultants. These are

based on a sample survey of existing firms operating within the development area together with new firms which commenced trading during the 12 months to 31 March.

Estate Action Programme

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he now expects the estate action programme to be completed on the Phythian street estate, Liverpool; and whether there are any plans to include the Chatsworth street estate, Edge Hill, in a similar programme.

Mr. Yeo: I expect the estate action programme at the Phythian street estate in Liverpool to be completed during the financial year 1994-95.

My right hon. Friend announced on 16 December 1991 that Liverpool city council had been invited to work up a detailed estate action scheme for the Chatsworth estate in Liverpool, with an anticipated start in 1992-93.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the television advertising campaigns and all other publicity campaigns costing over £100,000 to be carried out by his Department in February, March, April, May or June of the current year.

Mr. Heseltine: Jointly with the Department of Energy my Department will continue to carry out the campaign "Helping the Earth Begins at Home". This will run for at least two years.

An information campaign is now in progress to publicise the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act, 1990, relating to the duty of care for the carriage and disposal of waste. Also, in the coming months, I intend to mount campaigns relating to citizens' environmental rights and initiatives for protecting the countryside.

None of these campaigns involves television advertising.

Peat Extraction, Thorne Moor

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultation he has had with English Heritage over the arrangement between English Nature and Fisons plc on peat extraction on Thorne moor, Yorkshire.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 20 February 1992]:* None. Such consultations are a matter for English Nature to undertake as they consider necessary. I am advised that discussions with English Heritage on the future management of the Thorne conservation area will now take place.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to review the regulations concerning sites of special scientific interest in the light of the arrangements between English Nature and Fisons plc on peat extraction on Thorne moor, Yorkshire.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 20 February 1992]:* None. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) on 12 February 1992, *Official Report*, column *506*.

Fal Estuary (Pollution)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost involved in the proposals submitted to his Department by the National Rivers Authority for medium to long-term plans to tackle the pollution in the Fal estuary from the River Carnon; when he expects to take a decision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 21 February 1992]:* The National Rivers Authority's initial estimates of costs for the main options for tackling the mine discharge into the Carnon river are:

	£ thousands		
	1991-92	*1992-93*	*1993-94*
Monitoring programme	342	180	—
Short term treatment	185	460	—
Medium term treatment by biological anaerobic system:			
planning and design	—	100	—
construction and operation	—	900	350

Estimates have also been submitted for an alternative method of treatment in the medium term costing some £3 million per annum in a full year, and a longer term solution costing some £2·3 million over the first two years plus research and development costs. All these estimates may be subject to substantial amendment as planning and design work proceeds.

These are estimates of costs and not bids for extra resources. The NRA's head office are currently assessing the extent to which they can make provision for expenditure on Wheal Jane from within their existing budgets for 1991-92 and 1992-93. We expect to receive their assessment for 1991-92 later this month or early next, so that we can consider their grant-in-aid position. As in previous years, we will be reviewing later this year whether the NRA's grant for 1992-93 is adequate. The cost of installing and operating improved medium term treatment arrangements at Wheal Jane will be taken into account at that review.

For 1993-94 and later years, the NRA's grant will be considered in the normal way as a part of the 1992 public expenditure survey.

Ozone Layer

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will seek a meeting of the Montreal protocol signatories to discuss the latest reports about the depletion of the ozone layer; what consideration he has given to an earlier phasing out of CFCs because of their known effect on the layer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier *[pursuant to his answer, 12 February 1992, c. 504]:* I wish to stress that the Government are greatly concerned about the effects of ozone depletion and are committed to phasing out CFCs by the end of 1995 at the latest. Last December, I proposed to the EC Environment Council that the Montreal protocol's phase-out dates be brought forward to the end of 1994 for halons, and the end of 1995 for CFCs and other ozone-depleting substances. I also proposed that the intermediate cut stages should be brought forward to the end of 1993, with an 85 per cent. cut for CFCs and carbon tetrachloride and 50 per cent. cut for halons and methyl chloroform.

Following my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's letter of 14 February to the President of the EC Environment Council, urging the Community to take a stronger line on the early phase-out of CFCs, the European Commission has now proposed the phase-out of all controlled substances by the end of 1995. This issue was discussed at the informal Environment Council in Estoril, Portugal which I attended last weekend. Commissioner Ripa de Meana set out the Commission's proposals, which were generally welcomed by member states. Formal agreement to the proposed new phase-out dates will need to be given at the meeting of the Environment Council in March.

My officials are continuing to review our position with industry.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Local Offices

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish his definitions of *(a)* field offices, *(b)* inspector outstations and *(c)* customer access points in relation to the Benefits Agency; if he will list by category the offices within Renfrewshire; and what plans he has to recategorise any of these offices.

Mr. Jack: The location of field offices, inspector outstations and customer access points is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, chief executive of the Contributions Agency. She will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Social Fund

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for the year 1991-92 to date, how many social fund applications were referred back by social fund inspectors for reconsideration by social fund officers in Sheffield East and Sheffield West district; and for each district how many of those were *(a)* community care grants, *(b)* budgeting loans and *(c)* crisis loans; how many were revised wholly in the applicant's favour; how many were revised partially in favour of the applicant; and how many were unchanged from the social fund officer's original decision, broken down by district and type of application.

Mr. Scott: I am informed by the social fund commissioner that all the information cannot be provided in the form requested. The table summarises the data collected on decisions made by the social fund inspectors for the named districts, broken down by payment type, community care grant (CCG), budgeting loan (BL) and crisis loan (CL).

District / *Type of application*	*Sheffield East*			*Sheffield West*		
	CCG	*BL*	*CL*	*CCG*	*BL*	*CL*
(a) Referred back for determination by social fund officer (SFO)	42	22	2	11	5	1
(b) Changed by SFO	6	6	0	4	2	0
(c) Unchanged by SFO	35	15	2	3	1	1

Notes:

1. Data for April 1991 to 14 February 1992.
2. Changed decisions are defined as those resulting in an award being made to the applicant (b). Included in (b) are partially changed decisions which are not separately recorded. (c) represents decisions where no additional payment is awarded by the SFO on redetermination.
3. The difference in figures between the total of (b) + (c) and (a) is due to cases where notification of the final decision has not yet been received at the office of the social fund inspectors.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total number of applications for review to social fund officers for the year 1991-92 to date in the Sheffield East and Sheffield West districts; and for each district how many of those were *(a)* community care grants, *(b)* budgeting loans and *(c)* crisis loans; of those applications what was the total number revised wholly in favour of the applicant; of the total number of applications for review to social fund officers in Sheffield how many were reviewed partially in favour of the applicant; and what number of applications for review by social fund officers in Sheffield had the original decision confirmed, giving all answers by district and by type of application.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total number of claimants who are currently in debt to the social fund in Sheffield and the total amount that is owed by them.

Mr. Scott: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Disability

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all the statutory and departmental committees which advise him and his governmental colleagues on matters concerning the needs of disabled people.

Mr. Scott: The needs of disabled people can affect almost any aspect of life in the community, and therefore any advisory body may give advice on the needs of disabled people as part of a wider brief. In this Department, for example, the social security advisory committee looks at social security legislation some of which will affect people with disabilities. Issues affecting the needs of people with disabilities may also be considered through appropriate departmental and interdepartmental machinery as needed. Ministers may also seek advice on an ad hoc basis from non-statutory bodies.

The major statutory and departmental advisory committees primarily concerned with disability issues are:

Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee
Building Regulations Advisory Committee
Advisory Group on Rehabilitation
Industrial Injuries Advisory Council
War Pensions Committee
Attendance Allowance Board
Disability Living Allowance Board
Sheltered Employment Consultative Group
National Advisory Council on Employment of People with Disabilities
The 60 Committees for the Employment of People with Disabilities

Scotland

Building Standards Advisory Committee
Disability Research Committee
Committee on Special Educational Needs
Prosthetic Advisory Committee

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have *(a)* 40 per cent. or more disability and *(b)* 80 per cent. or more disability and how many in each category are aged (i) 60 to 65, (ii) 65 to 70, (iii) 70 to 75 and (iv) over 75 years in Great Britain.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not available.

Small Businesses

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements his Department has to assess proposals for regulations relating to occupational pensions and national insurance contributions and their effect on existing small firms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The Department regularly consults with employers organisations including representatives of small firms. As part of the Government's deregulation initiative, the Department also carries out compliance cost assessments on new proposals in both these and other fields to identify any impact that they may have on businesses of all sizes.

Additionally, in the case of occupational pensions, there is a statutory duty to refer, with limited exceptions, proposals to make regulations to the Occupational Pensions Board. The board, in considering such proposals and reporting back, consults a number of representative bodies including the Confederation of British Industry.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all the television advertising campaigns and all other publicity campaigns costing over £100,000 to be carried out by his Department in February, March, April, May or June of the current year.

Mr. Jack: Campaigns being carried out by the Department during this period are:

New disability benefits.
Change in hours rule for family credit and income support.
Advice to trustees of occupational pension schemes.

National Insurance

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost in 1991-92 and 1992-93 of abolishing the 2 per cent. rate of national insurance contributions on earnings below the lower earnings limit.

Mr. Jack: We estimate that the loss in revenue would be about £1 billion in both 1991-92 and 1992-93.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Social Fund

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases were referred to the social fund inspectors seeking a review of decisions made by social fund officers in each of the past two years.

Mr. Hanley: Social security operational matters are the responsibility of Mr. Alec Wylie, chief executive of the Social Security Agency. He will write to the hon. Gentleman and copies of his reply will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Electors

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total number of electors in each *(a)* council area in Northern Ireland, *(b)* each parliamentary constituency in Northern Ireland, *(c)* the total for Northern Ireland, on the 1992 register of electors and *(d)* what are the areas of each constituency.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

District Council	*Number of electors*[1]
Belfast	209,126
Derry	63,309
Limavady	19,282
Coleraine	37,138
Ballymoney	17,610
Moyle	10,509
Larne	22,318
Ballymena	42,091
Magherafelt	25,611
Cookstown	21,637
Strabane	25,319
Omagh	30,973
Fermanagh	39,112
Dungannon	32,354
Craigavon	54,520
Armagh	36,222
Newry and Mourne	58,207
Banbridge	24,891
Down	40,656
Lisburn	69,472
Antrim	30,227
Newtownabbey	55,155
Carrickfergus	24,527
North Down	54,464
Ards	49,089
Castlereagh	47,505
Total	1,141,324

[1] *Note:*
(a) Figures are taken from the electoral register published in February 1992.
(b) Shows electors registered to vote in local government elections and young people who, reaching the age of 18 before 16 February 1992, will then be eligible to vote in local government elections.

Constituency	*Number of electors*[1]	*Size in hectares*[2]
Belfast East	53,375	2,908
Belfast North	55,587	4,162
Belfast South	52,556	2,371
Belfast West	55,280	4,026
East Antrim	63,739	43,055
East Londonderry	76,912	145,839
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	71,472	266,000
Foyle	75,970	60,694
Lagan Valley	73,688	45,546

Constituency	Number of electors[1]	Size in hectares[2]
Mid Ulster	70,410	257,026
Newry and Armagh	68,716	109,721
North Antrim	70,217	154,490
North Down	69,604	10,269
Strangford	69,855	43,313
South Antrim	68,292	69,885
South Down	77,371	147,585
Upper Bann	68,422	48,036
Total	1,141,466	

[1] *Note:*
(a) Figures are taken from the electoral register published in February 1992.
(b) Shows electors registered to vote in parliamentary elections and young people who, reaching the age of 18 before 16 February 1993, will then be eligible to vote in a Parliamentary election.

[2] Including inland water.

Radioactivity, Glenshane

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by how many acres the designated area at Glenshane, County Londonderry has been reduced by Statutory order No. 527, 1991, what was the original level of radioactive contamination of the area now excluded and the present level of contamination; what was the original level of contamination and the present level of contamination of the area still under restriction; when he expects the remaining area to have its restrictions removed; what other areas in Northern Ireland and of what acreage are still under restrictions; when he expects those restrictions to be removed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: SR 1991 No. 527 reduced the restricted area at Glenshane, Co Londonderry, by approximately 568 acres. The highest level of radiocaesium recorded in sheep in the derestricted area of Glenshane before derestriction was 504 kg. No monitoring has been done in this area since derestriction. The highest level of contamination in sheep found in the area of Glenshane still under restriction, 3,723 kg, was recorded in 1987; the highest level recorded in 1991 was 1,289 kg. This apparent diminution in monitored levels must be interpreted with caution. The 1991 figure was recorded in sheep put forward for monitoring prior to movement out of the restricted area. These sheep are usually grazed on lower, clean pastures before monitoring resulting in lower levels being detected and cannot be taken as a true reflection of change in the situation in the upland areas.

Approximately 1,305 acres at Belraugh, Co Londonderry and 8,620 acres at Glenwherry, Co Antrim still remain under restriction. It is not possible to predict when the remaining restrictions will be removed. They will be lifted as soon as it is possible to do so without compromising the food chain.

National Insurance

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what would be the cost in 1991-92 and 1992-93 of abolishing the 2 per cent. rate of national insurance contributions on earnings below the lower earnings limit.

Mr. Hanley: The estimated costs are £23 million and £24 million, respectively.

Disability Statistics

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have *(a)* 40 per cent. or more disability and *(b)* 80 per cent. or more disability; and how many in each category are aged (i) 60 to 65, (ii) 65 to 70, (iii) 70 to 75 and (iv) over 75 years in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: Social security operational matters are the responsibility of Mr. Alec Wylie, chief executive of the Social Security Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies of his reply will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all the television advertising campaigns and all other publicity campaigns costing over £100,000 to be carried out by his Department in February, March, April, May or June of the current year.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

Campaign	Pedestrian safety
Duration	May-June
Type	Television
Cost	£100,000

Orange Halls (Damage)

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will list all the Orange halls reported to the police as damaged or destroyed by fire since 1 January 1990 and also indicate whether a chief constable's certificate for the purposes of the criminal damage legislation has been issued in respect of any of the above incidents.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* The available information is set out in the table:

Date and Orange halls which sustained serious damage

1. 14 July 1990
   Allistragh, Armagh
2. 18 August 1990
   Alexandra Park, Belfast
3. 21 August 1990
   Alexandra Park, Belfast
4. 26 August 1990
   Tullywhisker, Sion Mills
5. 4 October 1990
   Downpatrick
6. 16 November 1990
   Whitewell, Greencastle
7. 23 May 1991
   Dundrum
8. 7 July 1991
   Ballymoyer, Newtownhamilton
9. 14 July 1991
   Carnagh, Keady
10. 20 July 1991
    Kilmore, Moira
11. 28 July 1991
    Dungonnell, Antrim
12. 31 August 1991
    Donaghmore, Newry
13. 16 September 1991
    Derryadd, Lurgan
14. 9–12 October 1991
    Whitehill, Banbridge
15. 12 October 1991
    Glasgar, Banbridge
16. 24 December 1991

Charlemont, Moy

17. 25 January 1992
Tanaghmore, Markethill

18. 1 February 1992
Tanvally, Banbridge

19. 7 February 1992
Glebe Hill, Tandragee

Chief constable's certificates have been issued in respect of Nos. 5, 10, 12 and 13.

Agricultural Property (Damage)

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will list the incidents of malicious damage to agricultural property reported to the police since 1 January 1990.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 25 February 1992

HOME DEPARTMENT

Fire Safety

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what increase in fire service manpower he will require to deal with the obligations of the new building regulations and the removal of Crown immunity from health service bodies for initial fire inspection and ongoing monitoring; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Government take account of additional burdens on local authorities in the revenue support grant settlement each year, but it is for fire authorities to determine their manpower establishments in the light of their statutory duties under the Fire Services Act 1947 and the Fire Precautions Act 1971. My Department is discussing with the local authority associations the additional resources required by fire authorities as a result of the removal of Crown immunity from health service bodies. Those associations have the opportunity to inform the Government of their views on local authority expenditure needs through the annual consultations on the local government finance settlement.

International Crime Surveys

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the position of the United Kingdom in the figures produced for European countries in the international crime surveys for rape, robberies, assaults and murder.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The 1989 international crime survey, measuring crime in 1988, suggests that the robbery rate in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland was lower than the western European average. The same was true of assaults. The survey provides no reliable figures for rape, but for sexual assaults generally the position of the United Kingdom was again low. The results of the survey are published in "Experience of Crime across the World: Key Findings from the 1989 International Crime Survey" which is in the Library.

The survey cannot by its nature cover murder, but in 1988 rates of homicide, and attempted homicide, recorded by the police were lower in England and Wales than in 10 other of the EC countries. Rates in Northern Ireland and Scotland were higher than elsewhere except Luxembourg.

Crime, Leicestershire

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what number, and by what percentage, reported *(a)* criminal offences and *(b)* crimes of violence have increased in Leicestershire since May 1979.

Mr. John Patten: The available information compares the 12 months to June 1979 with the 12 months to June 1991. Between these periods, the total of notifiable offences in Leicestershire increased by 52,906—29,481 to 82,387—offences and crimes of violence increased by 2,245 offences—1,823 to 4,068.

Safer Cities Programme

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will add Oxford to the areas covered by the safer cities programme.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There are no plans at present to extend the safer cities programme beyond the current 20 projects. The objectives of the Home Office-funded safer cities programme are to reduce crime; lessen the fear of crime and create safer cities where economic enterprise and community life can flourish. We have now reached our target of 20 projects and there are no plans or resources at present to extend the programme any further.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the criteria for areas eligible for funding for crime research under the safer cities programme.

Mr. John Patten: Safer cities is a crime prevention initiative and not primarily a research programme. Areas were eligible for consideration for inclusion in the safer cities programme if they: (i) were districts, metropolitan districts or London boroughs within the urban programme; (ii) had serious crime and other social problems; (iii) were already the focus for Government action, and; (iv) were willing to participate. All 20 project areas in the current programme have been selected.

Oxfordshire Motor Project

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to take a decision on the application for funding by the Oxfordshire motor project.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We will announce a decision shortly.

Correspondence

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to respond to the letters of 4 November 1991 and 3 January 1992 from the hon. Member for Bradford, North concerning Mr. P. M. B. Fell of Lister Gardens, Bradford BD8 7AG.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It appears that the hon. Member's letters were not received in the Home Office. I am sending the hon. Member a copy of the reply which went to Mr. Fell on 28 November 1991.

Low-Energy Lighting

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make it his policy progressively to introduce low-energy lighting in all the buildings operated by his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: It is the policy to install low-energy lighting and other energy-saving devices where practicable into all Home Office buildings.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the poll tax cases which resulted in imprisonment, where evidence had been used of the kind ruled out by the High Court on 20 February.

Mr. John Patten: No.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what authority a magistrate can adjourn a case in anticipation of Parliament amending a law; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Magistrates courts have general powers to adjourn in both criminal and civil proceedings under the Magistrates Courts Act 1980.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has issued to magistrates and clerks of the court regarding the use of computer evidence in poll tax cases following the High Court decision of 20 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I do not think that any further guidance is necessary following this case.

War Crimes

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated additional police expenditure associated with the War Crimes Act 1991 for each of the next three financial years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Additional police expenditure associated with the War Crimes Act is estimated as follows:

	£ million
1992-93	1·5
1993-94	1·7
1994-95	1·65

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Rabies

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that quarantine will continue to be a requirement in regard to the import of those species which are vulnerable to rabies until the rest of the European Community is declared to be free of rabies.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to end rabies quarantine for dogs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Members to my reply of 24 February to my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill).

Low-Energy Lighting

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will make it his policy progressively to introduce low-energy lighting in all the buildings operated by his Department.

Mr. Curry: It is the existing policy of the Department to carry out in its buildings all energy-saving measures which can be shown to be worthwhile. As a result of this, a substantial investment has already been made in energy-efficient lighting; this will be extended to other buildings wherever practicable and as resources allow.

East Anglia

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his policy for the East Anglian farming industry in general and the livestock, dairy, cereals and poultry sectors in particular in the light of the single market opening.

Mr. Curry: The Government's policy for the United Kingdom farming industry as a whole is set out in the policy statement "Our Farming Future" launched by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 15 November.

Ozone Layer

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his departmental plant pathologists have made of results for agriculture of changes in the ozone layer.

Mr. Curry: Against the background of the Department of the Environment's continuing programme of work on the effects of ozone depletion on plants, this Department is considering advertising for a research proposal on this matter.

ENVIRONMENT

Norman Shaw Buildings

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment why the power failed in the Norman Shaw buildings at 2.35 pm on 13 February; and what steps will be taken to prevent a recurrence.

Mr. Yeo: The power failure in the Norman Shaw buildings on 13 February which lasted for less than two seconds, was caused by a fault within the London Electricity supply network. There was insufficient time for the back-up generator system to be activated.

Business Property Values

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what mechanisms exist or are planned for review of rateable values for the uniform business rate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: All rateable values, including those currently prescribed by my right hon. Friend, will be reassessed in 1995. We have announced that the proposed valuation date for the revaluation is 1 April 1993. In preparation, a committee is also reviewing the rating of plant and machinery.

All assessments in current rating lists are based on a common valuation date of 1 April 1988. Any changes in relative values since that date will be taken into account at the next revaluation. All ratepayers had the right to challenge their individual assessments during the first six months of the current lists. They continue to have rights of challenge where there is a change of circumstances affecting a property and in certain other prescribed cases.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment under which Act the regulations in the poll tax reduction schemes were made.

Mr. Key: Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, as inserted by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated revenue that will be received in 1991-92 from those who are required to pay 20 per cent. of their poll tax, in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 24 February 1992]:* The potential revenue in 1991-92 in Great Britain from those on maximum community charge benefit is £200 million and from students £34 million. Whilst information is held centrally on overall rates of collection by local authorities, no separate information is held on collection from those making the 20 per cent. contribution.

Nature Conservancy

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made on the recommendation from the former Nature Conservancy Council that a number of non-native species should be added to schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Mr. Trippier: Following recommendations made by the former Nature Conservancy Council and consultation with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and other bodies, I have decided that we should add the following species to schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981:

Animals

Noble crayfish
Signal crayfish
Turkish crayfish
Sika deer
New Zealand flatworm
Italian crested newt
Aesculapian snake

Plants

3 species of Giant kelp
macrocystis angustifolia
macrocystis integrifolia
macrocystis laevis
Japanese kelp
Green seafingers
Californian red seaweed
Hooked asparagus seaweed
All non-native laver seaweeds
Wakame

I have placed an order before Parliament today which will bring these additions into effect on 16 March.

Tyre Tread Depths

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provision is being made in landfill sites for the tipping of extra tyres as a result of the increase in minimum legal tyre tread depth; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We are making no specific provision although the United Kingdom is participating in an EC waste management study group which is considering means of achieving higher scrap tyre retreading and recycling rates across the community. Whole tyres are difficult to deal with on landfill sites, and an increasing number are now being shredded before disposal, but disposal in landfill is currently a matter for local authority regulators, site operators and producers of waste tyres. It would be for these parties to consider any immediate consequences of changes in tread depth requirements.

Cleaning Contract, Waveney

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce a decision on the inquiries into the way Waveney district council assigned their buildings cleaning work contract to its own direct services organisation in March 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Waveney district council's response to the notice served under section 13 of the Local Government Act 1988 is being considered. My right hon. Friend expects to announce his decision shortly.

Electronic Equipment (Recycling)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the recently published report, "End-of-Life Electronic Equipment: The Case for Recycling", prepared by the Centre for Exploitation of Science and Technology.

Mr. Baldry: The Library has a copy on order.

Low-Energy Lighting

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make it his policy progressively to introduce low-energy lighting in all the buildings operated by his Department.

Mr. Baldry: My Department's policy relating to the installation of low-energy lighting is to replace all standard luminaires, both tungsten and fluorescent, with low-energy consuming equivalents, wherever this is practicable and cost-effective. A programme of lighting replacement is in progress and low-energy lighting has already been installed in six major buildings representing about 60 per cent. of my Department's office estate.

Disabled People (Access)

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if advice on access arrangements for disabled people will be included in the published version of Planning Policy Guidance Note 1; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: We want to encourage the design and construction of new buildings that provide adequately for the needs of disabled people. Development control policy note 16, published in 1985, set out the role of local planning authorities in seeking to achieve that objective. It emphasised the need for the local planning authority and the developer to discuss the arrangements proposed for meeting the needs of disabled people, as one aspect of negotiation over planning applications. It also made clear that the role of the planning system in this context is limited. This is because the internal layout and design of buildings are not normally material to planning applications.

Part M of the building regulations imposes requirements on the design and construction of new non-domestic buildings, so that reasonable access and facilities for disabled people can be secured. Where the requirements of part M apply, planning legislation should not normally be used to impose separate requirements. This is because the internal standards of building construction are best regulated by means of a national code, so that developers know what to expect irrespective of the local authority area in which they are building. The building regulations do not yet extend to internal requirements for disabled people in new buildings. My Department is currently assessing the scope and timing of such an extension, which it hopes to implement next year.

In the interim, we welcome action by local authorities to bring the needs of disabled people in new housing development to the attention of developers, but it would not be right for individual authorities to spend time designing alternative standards, and seeking to impose these through local or unitary development plans, or through planning conditions. However, where there is clear evidence of local need, a local planning authority could include in a local plan a policy indicating that it would seek to negotiate elements of housing accessible to the disabled on suitable sites.

The Government consulted on new guidance on access and the planning system in an annex to the draft Planning Policy Guidance Note 1, issued for public consultation on 1 October 1991. In view of the current work on part M of the building regulations, we have concluded that it would not be appropriate to include detailed guidance which would be soon out of date in the final version of PPG1 to be published shortly. Instead, we propose to issue a circular in due course on access requirements which will take account of progress on this issue.

Revenue Support Grant

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the actual or estimated total of all debt charges by the charging authorities receiving revenue support grant; and if he will state the reasons for the difference between this sum and the sum of £2,469,200,000 ascribed to debts charges in Annex B of HC 190 of 1991-92.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 21 February 1992]:* Charging authorities budgeted for debt charges of £2,328 million in 1991-92. This is not comparable with the sum of £2,469,200,000 shown in annex B of HC 190, which relates to both charging and precepting authorities, and represents the net provision for debt charges in 1992-93 after capital financing grants have been taken into account.

Plutonium

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps have been taken to monitor the ecological suspension of plutonium in the environment arising from the atmospheric distribution of plutonium in the accident at Sellafield on 19 June 1961.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 24 February 1992]:* Details of this incident were provided to the Windscale inquiry in 1977 and in information supplied to Sir Douglas Black's independent advisory group's investigations in 1984 into the incident of leukaemias. Monitoring of radionuclides in the environment was initiated in 1952 and their transfer from one environmental medium to another has been the subject of detailed investigation.

WALES

Child Refugees

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what financial support he is providing to child refugees in Cardiff.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Refugee matters are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. Services provided by health and local authorities are not in general differentiated by status of user and it is not possible separately to identify funding provided by the Department for services to child refugees from wider support for services for children. Urban programme funding of some £394,000 has however been approved in South Glamorgan since 1989-90 for projects directed towards the needs of refugees; it is likely that children will have benefited.

Speech Therapy

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what level of resources have been allocated for speech therapy for children in Wales and in Gwent with a formal statement of needs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not available centrally. The provision of speech therapy services is primarily a matter for the individual health authority to deliver in light of competing demands on available resources.

A predicted national shortage of trained speech therapists has been identified for which the Department has made funding of £62,000 available to the health authorities to sponsor ten speech therapy students placements. In addition, the Scientific Staffs Whitley Council has introduced a more flexible pay and grading structure to help overcome local problems of recruitment and retention.

A48

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to make an announcement regarding his proposals to introduce a crawler lane for the A48 at Hardwick hill, Chepstow; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Gwent county council, as agent, is currently considering several options for the improvement of Hardwick Hill on its existing alignment. To confirm the feasibility of each of these options further studies have to be carried out. It is not possible to predict when an announcement will be made until the results of these studies are evaluated.

Livestock Exports

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many livestock exporters have been prosecuted in 1991 for breach of the welfare code for export of live animals to the EC; and what were the corresponding figures for the last five years.

Mr. David Hunt: This information is not available centrally.

School Repairs

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many school buildings were assessed as being in need of fundamental repair in the years 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Local education authorities are responsible for the repair and maintenance of their school buildings and this information is not held centrally.

Development Initiatives

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what evaluation he has carried out of the *(a)* Swansea bay initiative, *(b)* valleys initiative, *(c)* information technology initiative, *(d)* financial services initiative and *(e)* road to opportunity initiative; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows.

The valleys initiative launched in 1986 by Mr. Nicholas Edwards, now Lord Crickhowell, was evaluated in 1988 by the department of town planning, UWIST, Cardiff. Progress on the programme for the valleys, launched by my predecessor in 1988, is monitored at six-monthly intervals. Reports are published regularly; the most recent was on 19 February 1992. I will consider the most appropriate form of evaluation when the programme ends in March 1993.

The financial services initiative, the Swansea Bay partnership and IT Wales are initiatives organised by local authorities, the private sector and the Welsh Development Agency, which are intended to help promote inward investment. It is primarily for the partners concerned to evaluate progress. Based on information provided by companies at the time of their decision to invest, 151 inward investment projects have been recorded for Wales so far this financial year. These projects promise more than 14,000 new and safeguarded jobs and include eight projects in financial services, 12 in information technology and 19 in Swansea bay.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, announced on 11 December 1991 his intention to launch a review of the "A55—Road of Opportunity". The review is proceeding.

Low-Energy Lighting

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will make it his policy progressively to introduce low-energy lighting in all the buildings operated by his Department.

Mr. David Hunt: It is already my Department's policy to introduce low-energy lighting where it is feasible and economic to do so.

Cardiff Royal Infirmary

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future of the Cardiff royal infirmary following the rejection of the application to pursue trust status.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The future of the hospital is a matter initially for the South Glamorgan health authority. No application for NHS trust status has been made. The position is that following the expression of interest

submitted by the Cardiff Royal group of hospitals, the decision whether to invite a formal application was deferred pending the outcome of the strategic review announced by the South and Mid Glamorgan health authorities.

Hospitals

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those decisions already made on hospital reorganisation or closures which have been deferred from being announced in February, March or April *(a)* by his Department and *(b)* by each district health authority in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: None.

Young Offenders

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much secure accommodation is available in Wales for persistent young offenders; and what representations he has received about his current proposals on the subject.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: No secure accommodation is available in Wales for persistent young offenders. The three existing small secure units are suitable for short-term use only.

On 14 August 1991, I published proposals for a comprehensive strategy to tackle this problem emphasising the development of alternatives to secure accommodation as well as proposing a new all-Wales facility. There has been a general endorsement of the report and its recommendations and responses have included additional comments and suggestions which will now be taken forward for discussion with a consortium of relevant authorities. Some of the recommendations contained in the report for Welsh Office action are already in hand or have been actioned, for example a review of conditions of use of the existing secure units in Wales. I have also considered applications for funding special initiatives aimed at avoiding the need for young people to be placed in secure accommodation. Two successful applications have already been announced and I hope to announce a third later in the year.

Adult Students

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many adult students have been, or are at present on access courses leading to higher education during the years 1989-90, 1990-91, and 1991-92 in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The number of students aged 19 and over, recorded by colleges of higher and further education as being on access courses, was 123 in 1989-90 and 503 in 1990-91. Information for 1991-92 is not yet available.

Health Promotion Authority

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the budget for the Health Promotion Authority for Wales in 1992-93.

Mr. David Hunt: Subject to parliamentary approval, in 1992-93 a total of £2,830,000 will be made available for the authority's core allocation, and a further £355,000 will be allocated for new projects. An additional £29,000 will be available as a further earmarked reserve to meet the cost of the authority's contribution to the family planning information service, and in addition £20,000 will be available to fund the authority's capital expenditure. Finally, for 1992-93 only, the Department will make a further £126,000 available for the authority's life education centres project. The allocation will be conditional upon satisfactory completion of annual performance review. It represents a further and substantial commitment of resources to the authority.

Food (Self-sufficiency)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the level of self-sufficiency of Wales in *(a)* fish, *(b)* mutton and lamb, *(c)* poultrymeat, *(d)* beef, *(e)* oats, *(f)* cheese, *(g)* liquid milk, *(h)* barley, *(i)* potatoes, *(j)* pigmeat, *(k)* eggs, *(l)* wheat and *(m)* butter and what were the equivalent figures for 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 13 February 1992]:* Estimates of the level of self sufficiency, defined as the ratio of production to consumption, are given in the table. The consumption figures, which are taken from the results of the national food survey, are based on a sample size of 480 households in Wales. The self-sufficiency ratios will therefore be subject to significant estimation errors. Information is not yet available in respect of 1991.

	Self-sufficiency (production/consumption)		
	1988	*1989*	*1990*
(a) fish		[2]n.a.	
(b) mutton and lamb	4·9	[1]—	4·4
(c) poultrymeat	2·0	1·9	1·6
(d) beef	3·6	[1]—	4·0
(e) oats		[2]n.a.	
(f) cheese	2·1	2·1	2·4
(g) liquid milk	3·5	3·4	3·3
(h) barley		[2]n.a.	
(i) potatoes	0·9	0·7	0·7
(j) pigmeat	0·5	0·6	0·4
(k) eggs	0·8	0·9	0·9
(l) wheat		[2]n.a.	
(m) butter	1·3	1·6	1·9

[1]Self-sufficiency ratios for mutton and lamb and beef have not been calculated for 1989 as the relevant per capita consumption data for Wales are not regarded as reliable.
[2]Not available.

Empty Council Houses

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of unoccupied council houses in Wales in the years 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 24 February 1992]:* The information requested is given in the table:

Local authority vacant dwellings[1]

	Available for letting[2]	*Undergoing repair or improvement*[3]	*Awaiting repair or improvement*	*Awaiting sale*	*Awaiting demolition*	*Other*	*Total vacant dwellings*	*Vacant for more than 6 months*	*Local authority stock*[4] *(thousands)*
1981	583	1,207	—	—	—	—	1,790	—	288,359
1982	2,005	1,621	—	—	—	—	3,626	—	278,400
1983	1,389	1,980	—	—	—	—	3,369	—	265,287
1984	1,603	1,665	—	—	—	—	3,268	—	259,823
1985	1,100	1,820	—	—	—	—	2,920	—	255,886
1986	774	1,501	396	56	54	147	2,928	329	258,050
1987	690	1,656	653	103	47	180	3,329	437	253,178
1988	840	1,731	496	29	12	81	3,189	385	248,074
1989	768	1,616	371	25	29	143	2,952	474	237,702
1990	794	1,518	355	13	178	165	3,023	327	228,204
1991	639	1,511	—	43	73	164	2,430	406	223,576

[1] At 1 April.
[2] Includes 42 dwellings from transferred Cwmbran stock.
[3] Prior to 1986 this figure includes vacant dwellings awaiting repair or improvements prior to 1986. The figure for 1986 includes 82 dwellings in the transferred Cwmbran stock for which no breakdown between dwellings undergoing or awaiting repair or improvement is available. Figures after 1990 represent the total number of dwellings to be let after repairs.
[4] Excludes New Towns. Cwmbran ceased to be designated as a New Town on 1 April 1986 at which date its stock was transferred to Torfaen and is included in local authority stock since 1986.

This information was published in "Welsh Housing Statistics No. 11, 1991", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Homelessness

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many homeless people there were in Wales by district council area in the years, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 24 February 1992]:* This information is given in the table.

Number of persons in households accepted as homeless under Part III of the Housing Act 1985, by district

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Aberconwy	177	108	162	137	104
Alyn and Deeside	330	485	528	474	499
Arfon	102	63	65	77	93
Blaenau Gwent	463	595	695	841	761
Brecknock	180	176	243	269	318
Cardiff	1,592	2,971	3,334	2,483	4,052
Carmarthen	255	213	164	189	227
Ceredigion	188	187	180	331	373
Colwyn	104	87	93	[1]103	178
Cynon Valley	603	710	530	623	1,017
Delyn	712	679	1,002	825	683
Dinefwr	141	185	124	181	410
Dwyfor	163	119	178	162	127
Glyndwr	63	30	43	46	87
Islwyn	121	204	313	370	399
Llanelli	408	302	343	297	383
Lliw Valley	254	143	288	338	284
Meirionnydd	137	210	230	250	257
Merthyr Tydfil	207	191	359	496	365
Monmouth	618	576	357	281	388
Montgomeryshire	100	156	127	188	259
Neath	629	636	496	610	656
Newport	1,550	1,635	2,460	2,696	2,936
Ogwr	994	1,193	1,176	1,332	1,671
Port Talbot	357	327	442	303	340
Preseli	176	194	153	209	255
Radnorshire	31	60	36	64	45
Rhondda	268	270	292	166	358
Rhuddlan	296	256	273	293	177
Rhymney Valley	410	580	655	439	[2]395
South Pembrokeshire	210	271	241	248	205
Swansea[3]	654	439	345	450	1,779
Taff-Ely	321	395	442	568	715
Torfaen	708	881	968	1,216	1,038
Vale of Glamorgan	293	755	1,042	1,160	1,184
Wrexham Maelor	522	717	740	863	730
Ynys Mon	65	106	49	97	111

[1] Excludes those persons in the 2,000 estimated households made homeless as a result of the major flooding incident in February 1990.
[2] Information for 1991 is provisional.
[3] It is known that the figure for Swansea prior to 1991 was under-recorded by the authority.
Source: Welsh Office local authority returns.

THE ARTS

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Minister for the Arts what is the total number of employees in the Office of Arts and Libraries; and how many are *(a)* black and *(b)* disabled.

Mr. Renton: The Office of Arts and Libraries has currently 59 members of staff. Equal opportunities policy is monitored on an on-going basis in the Department.

All staff are asked to complete a questionnaire on their ethnic origins but individuals are not obliged to return them. Currently, three respondents to the questionnaire have declared they are members of the ethnic minorities. One member of staff in the Department is currently registered as disabled, but there may be others with disabilities who have chosen not to register.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will publish a table showing the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in his office in each of grades (i) 1, (ii) 2, (iii) 3, (iv) 4, (v) 5, (vi) 6, (vii) 7, (viii) SEO, (ix) HEO, (x) administrative trainee, (xi) EO, (xii) CO and (xiii) CA.

Mr. Renton: The current number of men and women in the Office of Arts and Libraries in grades 2, 5, 6, 7, SEO, HEO, HEO(D), EO, AO and AA is as follows. The Department does not employ anyone at grades 1, 3 and 4.

	Men	*Women*
Grade 2	1	—
Grade 5	3	1
Grade 6	—	1
Grade 7	8	2
SEO	2	1

	Men	Women
HEO	5	5
HEO(D)/AT	—	1
EO	3	5
AO	3	5
AA	3	1
Total	28	22

ENERGY

Low-Energy Lighting

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will make it his policy progressively to introduce low-energy lighting in all the buildings operated by his Department.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Low-energy lighting is installed in major areas of the Department's headquarters building, 1 Palace street, which accounts for some 85 per cent. of its energy use. Further installations are under active consideration.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Stock Exchange Investment

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the yield from capital gains on the sale of stock exchange investment by individuals *(a)* cashing in and *(b)* reinvesting, in 1988-89 and 1990-91.

Mr. Maude: Total net capital gains tax liabilities of individuals and trusts are estimated to be:

1988-89 liabilities—£2,000 million
1990-91 liabilities—£1,150 million.

Table 12.6 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1991", which provides an analysis of net chargeable gains on 1988-89 disposals broken down by type of asset, suggests that about a quarter of the 1988-89 liability is attributable to ordinary shares quoted on the London stock exchange. A comparable analysis of 1990-91 liabilities is not yet available.

Finer analysis to isolate the amount of gains where the proceeds are reinvested is not available, but from the evidence which is available, it is thought that more of the tax liability from quoted shares will arise from disposals where the proceeds are reinvested than where the proceeds are used for other purposes.

The figures quoted exclude gains made by companies included in corporation tax.

Taxpayers

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the reduction in annual liability to capital gains tax, in 1991-92 and 1992-93 as against the 1978-79 indexed regime specifying in each case the total and average reduction per taxpayer as well as the number of taxpayers in each year, in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maude: Estimates of the difference between the CGT liability on the current regime and on the 1978-79 indexed regime are not available, as indicated in my reply to the hon. Member on 15 March 1991, *Official Report*, columns *704-5*.

Latest available estimates of taxpayer numbers for capital gains tax for 1991-92 and 1992-93, assuming statutory indexation of the annual exempt amount, excluding gains realised by companies, which are included in assessments to corporation tax, are:

Liabilities	*Thousands*
1991-92	105
1992-93	90

Debtor Countries

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government will encourage commercial banks to make a response to debtor countries comparable with that of Governments through the Trinidad terms.

Mr. Maples: The Government's position is that whenever the Paris club grants Trinidad arrangements, it should insist that the debtor seeks similar treatment from other creditors. The Government have also supported proposals for limited use of IMF and World bank resources to support voluntary agreements on debt relief between debtors and banks. But the final decisions on relief concerning these commercial debts must be made by the banks and is a matter for their commercial judgment.

PRIME MINISTER

Magnetic Resonance Imaging Scanners

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions have been held to seek joint purchases of MRI scanners by the Northern Ireland health authorities with the Departments of Health in Scotland and England.

The Prime Minister: No approaches have been made to health authorities in England about the purchase of MRI scanners. However, the Northern Ireland health and personal social services management executive is shortly to establish a new regionally managed supplies organisation which will be expected to seek opportunities for greater savings by co-operating with other supplies agencies in the United Kingdom.

The Scottish Health Common Services Agency has already placed an order for a number of MRIs—and it is therefore not possible for the Northern Ireland authorities to join with Scotland at this stage.

Exchange Rate Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister, further to his letter dated 13 February to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby on the effect of exchange rate policy, what assessment has been made of the effect on pricing out of overseas markets of United Kingdom exports, and the pricing into domestic markets of imports, of increases in the real value of the pound sterling; and if he will publish a table showing the changes in the indices of import and export values of manufactures as a consequence of each quinquennial change in the statistical base.

The Prime Minister: The Government cannot determine the real exchange rate over the medium term. The crucial factor determining competitiveness is the effectiveness of United Kingdom producers in controlling their costs. Value indices of trade in manufacturing are not published.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister (1) further to his letter dated 13 February to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, whether he will distinguish those periods in the last 25 years in which Her Majesty's Government assess the pound sterling to have been *(a)* overvalued and *(b)* undervalued;

(2) if he will give the figures underlying the statement in his letter to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby of 13 February that the central rate at which the pound sterling entered the ERM was close to the pound sterling's average real rate over the previous 25 years.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Treasury bulletin for winter 1990-91 volume 2, issue 1, pages 25-32 which analyses
"measures of real exchange rates and competitiveness",
in particular chart 4 on page 31 shows the real sterling exchange rate against other ERM countries and the long run average 1966 to 1990.

Exports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish a table showing, for each of the years 1965 to 1991, the Department of Trade and Industry and the International Monetary Fund indices of trade-weighted relative export unit values base on the second half of 1973=100, estimated where necessary on the basis of movements in the rate of exchange since the quarter in which the figures for other countries were last made available.

The Prime Minister: The Department of Trade and Industry does not produce a relative export unit value series. The information from the International Monetary Fund series is in the table. Data for 1991 are not available.

United Kingdom relative[1] export unit value index—UVI—for manufactured goods

	Value
1979	119·9
1980	134·0
1981	131·5
1982	123·7
1983	120·4
1984	117·6
1985	119·7
1986	116·9
1987	121·5
1988	131·8
1989	124·6
1990	129·1

[1] United Kingdom's UVI of manufactured goods compared with an export-weighted average of 16 major competitors, in common currency.

Manufactures

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister, further to his letter dated 13 February to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, what criteria he uses in judging whether United Kingdom manufactures are fully competitive at home and overseas.

The Prime Minister: A number of indicators of competitiveness are readily available in, for example, the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics". But the underlying competitiveness of United Kingdom manufacturers is best demonstrated by the United Kingdom's rising share of world trade over the last three years, as shown by the chart on page 62 of the Autumn Statement.

Pelagic Fish

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will make an assessment of the implications for the pelagic fishing industry of the collapse of markets in eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the discussions held with President Yeltsin concerning supplies of pelagic fish to Russian and other Commonwealth of Independent States markets;

(3) what progress he has made following his discussions with President Yeltsin in establishing pelagic fish as part of the European Community food aid programme to eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Disruption of the long-established trade with Russia and other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States could have serious implications for the Scottish pelagic fishing industry, even though they have been making commendable efforts to find other market outlets. The possibility that pelagic fish might be included in the EC's food aid programme or credit guarantee scheme is being explored by Departments, including in contacts with the Russian authorities. So far, no request for assistance of this type has been received from Russia.

Low-Energy Lighting

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Prime Minister whether he will make it his policy progressively to introduce low-energy lighting in all the offices used in connection with his offices of state.

The Prime Minister: Following an energy audit of 10 to 12 Downing street, high-efficiency, low-energy lamps have been installed where appropriate. Low-energy luminaires and krypton tubes have also been installed.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gibraltar (Homosexuals)

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that the requirements of article 8 of the European convention on human rights apply to homosexual acts between consenting adults in Gibraltar.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The European convention on human rights applies in Gibraltar and its laws must, therefore, comply with the convention's provisions. To meet the particular requirement of article 8 of the convention, the Gibraltar Government have drafted an amendment to their criminal offences ordinance. We are considering this.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom, as a depositary state for the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, received a copy of the safeguards agreement deposited with the International Atomic Energy Agency on 30 January by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, pursuant to North Korea's obligations under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom's status as a depositary power for the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons—NPT—does not of itself entitle us to receive copies of safeguards agreements negotiated by the International Atomic Energy Agency with states parties to the NPT. However, as a member of the IAEA board of governors the United Kingdom has received a copy of the minor amendments to the standard full scope safeguards text agreed between the IAEA and the North Koreans.

BBC World Service

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessments he has made of the quality of the BBC World Service broadcasts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The BBC World Service's reputation for the high quality, accuracy and impartiality of its broadcasts is well established and fully merited. The World Service attracts the largest audience of any international broadcaster, estimated at more than 120 million regular listeners.

We continue to place great value on the World Service and the benefits it brings to Britain's international reputation.

Afghanistan

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to restore diplomatic relations with Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Diplomatic relations with Afghanistan have not been broken. The Afghan embassy in London continues to function under a chargé d'affaires. British diplomats were withdrawn from Kabul in February 1989 because of the uncertain security situation. We have no present plans to reopen the embassy.

Croatia

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) of 5 February, *Official Report*, columns *190-91*, if he will list the undertakings given by the Croatian Government on minorities legislation; and what plans he has to monitor their implementation.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Croatian Government have stated their full acceptance of the provisions in the draft treaty prepared by Lord Carrington on the rights of national minorities and an autonomy for areas in which persons belonging to a national or ethnic group form a majority. We are pressing for the implementation of these provisions in Croatian legislation.

Baltic States

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment Her Majesty's Government have undertaken of the extent to which each of the Baltic states is respecting the rights of all residents in full accordance with international requirements of respect for human rights, without regard to race, religion and colour.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Baltic States are members of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe and have therefore undertaken to abide by the human rights provisions of that agreement. In our political dialogue with the Baltic states, we make clear whenever appropriate the importance we attach to human rights.

Lithuania

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the borders of Lithuania as currently recognised by Her Majesty's Government; and what is the historical basis for that recognition.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The borders of Lithuania are those within which the former Soviet Republic of Lithuania existed de facto at the time of our recognition of the Republic of Lithuania as an independent state, in August 1991.

Low-Energy Lighting

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make it his policy progressively to introduce low-energy lighting in all the buildings operated by his Department.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: It is already the policy of both diplomatic and aid wings of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office progressively to install energy-efficient lighting in their buildings.

Abortion

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will urge the Government of Ireland to change the anti-abortion provision in its constitution; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: The Irish Supreme Court is considering how article 40.3.3 of the Irish constitution should be applied. It would not be right for the British Government to intervene.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Commonwealth of Independent States

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the estimated cost of the airlift of food to the Commonwealth of Independent States to *(a)* Britain and *(b)* all donors.

Mrs. Chalker: British beef flown to St. Petersburg at the turn of the year formed part of the European Community's 200 mecu food aid package. All transportation costs are being met from this allocation. No other significant airlifts of food from Britain have taken place.

The British Government have no figures for costs incurred by other countries in airlifting food to the former Soviet Union.

Development Assistance

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give the amounts of official development assistance allocated as bilateral aid in the sectors of primary health, primary education, rural water supply and family planning in the years 1974 to the present, including financial aid and technical co-operation.

Mrs. Chalker: Figures prior to 1980 are not available. Bilateral aid expenditure for the period 1980 to 1990 was as follows:

United Kingdom bilateral aid expenditure on primary health, primary education, rural water supply and family planning 1980-1990 (cash prices)[1,2]

£ thousands

	Primary education	Primary health[3]	Family planning	Rural water supply
1980	171	4,134	886	1,609
1981	419	730	283	1,518
1982	119	1,868	1,829	1,246
1983	128	4,195	3,794	557
1984	614	2,939	2,747	742
1985	384	3,586	2,439	1,280
1986	509	2,041	1,520	53,918
1987	723	752	686	7,601
1988	1,425	5,891	1,746	7,826
1989	1,071	5,264	1,115	10,006
1990	1,678	15,026	6,232	3,718

[1] Figures refer to the primary sector which benefits from any expenditure. They exclude expenditure classified to other sectors which may also benefit the primary sector (e.g. expenditure on primary teacher training may be classified under teacher training, not primary education).
[2] Technical cooperation expenditure is not included for 1980-87.
[3] Includes family planning.

Note: Figures include Project Aid provided by the Commonwealth Development Corporation.

Health Care Projects

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give the amounts of official development assistance allocated as bilateral project aid in the primary health care sector for the years 1974 to the present.

Mrs. Chalker: Figures prior to 1980 are not available. Bilateral project aid expenditure, excluding technical co-operation, for the period 1980 to 1990 was as follows:

Year	Expenditure (£ thousands)
1980	4,134
1981	730
1982	1,868
1983	4,195
1984	2,939
1985	3,586
1986	2,041
1987	752
1988	2,575
1989	844
1990	9,308

Note: Includes expenditure on family planning.

Workers' Co-operatives

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many projects involving the development of workers' co-operatives in the third world have commenced since 1988, by year;

(2) what is the total amount of money invested in the development and setting up of workers' co-operatives in the third world since 1988, by year.

Mrs. Chalker: Comprehensive statistics on aid to workers' co-operatives are not separately maintained and cannot readily or accurately be extracted. A number of projects financed under country programmes have, during the period, included significant elements supporting workers' co-operatives, for example the rural development project in Bangladesh, the co-operatives and rural business development training project in Vanuatu and the handicraft marketing project in Zimbabwe. Other projects will have include smaller components for workers' co-operatives.

Assistance has also been provided under the joint funding scheme. The number and cost of projects approved since 1988 which were primarily concerned with workers' co-operatives were:

	Number	Cost (£)
1988-89	3	9,000
1989-90	6	31,000
1990-91	6	57,900
1991-92	3	10,700

In other cases, support for workers' co-operatives will have formed a smaller part of the project.

In addition to project support, an annual average of three members of workers' co-operatives have, since 1988, been given awards to attend courses at the international co-operative training centre at Loughborough.

HEALTH

NHS Overseas Ltd

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when NHS Overseas Services Ltd. was set up; what its objectives are; whether its mission statement and business plan have been placed in the Library; how many staff it employs and at what grade; and what its cost in 1992-93 is expected to be.

Mr. Dorrell: I have arranged for the Chairman of NHS Overseas Enterprises to write to the hon. Member; a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

GP Complaints

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to speed up the family practitioner committee complaints system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: On 2 April 1990 the Government introduced changes to speed up and simplify the family health services complaints system. We are presently considering the scope for Family Health Services Authorities to improve the administration of the complaints procedures.

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans to publicise statistics of complaints received by family practitioner committees and the General Medical Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Statistics on the number of formal investigations into complaints by Family Health Services Authorities are published annually in "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics", copies of which are available in the Library.

The General Medical Council is an independent statutory body whose procedures are governed by the 1983 Medical Act. A summary of complaints received and considered by the council is published by it annually.

King's College Hospital (Death)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will institute an inquiry into the death of Frederick Seymour at King's college hospital, London SE5, at the accident and emergency department, following the remarks of the coroner at the inquest on the deceased.

Mr. Dorrell: The regional health authority has set up an external inquiry to investigate this tragic incident.

Hospitals (Parking)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines are issued to health authorities regarding the imposition of car parking charges for patients, visitors or staff at national health service hospitals.

Mr. Dorrell: No such guidance has been issued, as this is a matter for local determination.

No-fault Compensation

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the working of no-fault compensation schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: No full assessment has been made of the working of no-fault compensation schemes, although the Department has noted developments in Scandinavian countries and New Zealand. The question of no-fault compensation was fully debated last year during the NHS (Compensation) Bill. The House decided on a free vote against the measure and the Bill did not receive a Second Reading.

Medical Training

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department of the December High Court ruling in respect of the Joint Committee on Higher Medical Training; if he has any plans to revise the arrangements by which the General Medical Council delegates to the medical royal colleges the regulation of post graduate medical training leading to United Kingdom accreditation; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: An appeal has been lodged against the High Court ruling and we would not wish to comment until the outcome of the appeal is known.

Prescriptions

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for each NHS region and health district what was *(a)* the total number of prescriptions and *(b)* the total number of prescriptions that incurred charges in 1988 and 1991; and if he will express the latter as a percentage of the former.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information for 1988-89 is not available. Information for the financial years 1989-90 and 1990-91 is in the table.

Total Prescriptions Dispensed by Chemist and Appliance Contractors

FPC Name	*1989-90*			*1990-91*		
	Total	*Chargeable*	*Percentage*	*Total*	*Chargeable*	*Percentage*
Cleveland	4,645,593	674,509	14·5	4,742,004	648,293	13·7
Cumbria	3,465,124	650,960	18·8	3,566,067	633,483	17·8
Durham	4,875,161	740,129	15·2	5,005,114	708,441	14·2
Northumberland	2,077,930	375,987	18·1	2,135,101	365,735	17·1
Gateshead	1,774,914	258,388	14·6	1,791,076	244,524	13·7
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,551,553	326,188	12·8	2,585,659	312,000	12·1
North Tyneside	1,838,823	251,353	13·7	1,853,674	237,069	12·8
South Tynside	1,441,112	171,487	11·9	1,479,724	161,017	10·9
Sunderland	2,898,914	342,866	11·8	2,926,604	325,004	11·1
Northern	25,569,124	3,791,868	14·8	26,085,023	3,635,566	13·9
Humberside	6,768,700	1,027,742	15·2	6,846,640	978,061	14·3
North Yorkshire	4,275,083	757,755	17·7	4,389,417	740,198	16·9
Bradford	4,277,766	578,667	13·5	4,328,881	549,174	12·7
Calderdale	1,639,454	271,693	16·6	1,702,257	267,932	15·7
Kirklees	2,857,411	513,388	18·0	2,898,651	486,789	16·8
Leeds	6,013,320	930,678	15·5	6,104,747	890,517	14·6
Wakefield	2,759,190	438,637	15·9	2,844,187	425,105	14·9
Yorkshire	28,590,924	4,518,559	15·8	29,114,780	4,337,776	14·9
Derbyshire	6,487,547	1,184,802	18·3	6,624,863	1,143,588	17·3
Leicestershire	6,153,752	1,153,423	18·7	6,271,886	1,100,908	17·6
Lincolnshire	3,658,907	619,919	16·9	3,757,464	584,846	15·6
Nottinghamshire	7,254,541	1,285,193	17·7	7,458,561	1,228,879	16·5
Barnsley	2,191,445	279,842	12·8	2,187,861	260,122	11·9

FPC Name	1989-90 Total	1989-90 Chargeable	1989-90 Percentage	1990-91 Total	1990-91 Chargeable	1990-91 Percentage
Doncaster	2,765,903	387,152	14·0	2,836,161	369,282	13·0
Rotherham	2,082,331	292,406	14·0	2,107,267	278,733	13·2
Sheffield	4,817,349	654,625	13·6	4,893,289	626,028	12·8
Trent	35,411,775	5,857,363	16·5	36,137,352	5,592,386	15·5
Cambridgeshire	3,480,702	725,805	20·9	3,622,234	702,202	19·4
Norfolk	4,047,224	743,357	18·4	4,230,216	731,160	17·3
Suffolk	3,476,437	696,214	20·0	3,567,657	673,420	18·9
East Anglia	11,004,363	2,165,376	19·7	11,420,107	2,106,782	18·4
Bedfordshire	3,340,943	691,350	20·7	3,385,068	657,867	19·4
Hertfordshire	6,321,276	1,469,875	23·3	6,453,717	1,415,252	21·9
Barnet	2,048,821	396,549	19·4	2,075,473	381,753	18·4
Brent and Harrow	3,245,635	612,335	18·9	3,287,635	576,916	17·5
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	4,693,664	896,906	19·1	4,741,660	841,151	17·7
Hillingdon	1,700,576	369,255	21·7	1,721,949	350,928	20·4
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	2,358,714	655,211	27·8	2,361,988	623,929	26·4
North West Thames	23,709,629	5,091,481	21·5	24,027,490	4,847,797	20·2
Essex	9,874,403	2,043,221	20·7	10,132,792	1,961,065	19·4
Barking and Havering	2,801,735	537,117	19·2	2,807,571	499,236	17·8
Camden and Islington	2,555,908	485,247	19·0	2,570,372	451,263	17·6
City, Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets	5,116,857	698,195	13·6	5,203,786	643,292	12·4
Enfield and Haringey	3,151,598	592,033	18·8	3,253,609	555,331	17·1
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	3,566,650	645,390	18·1	3,604,724	604,857	16·8
North East Thames	27,067,151	5,001,203	18·5	27,572,854	4,715,044	17·1
East Sussex	5,714,784	929,082	16·3	5,809,616	889,044	15·3
Kent	10,708,354	2,068,884	19·3	10,906,431	1,983,984	18·2
Bexley and Greenwich	3,090,571	579,471	18·7	3,122,385	539,132	17·3
Bromley	1,975,701	425,869	21·6	2,008,178	410,927	20·5
Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark	5,171,672	832,863	16·1	5,269,598	780,601	14·8
South East Thames	26,661,082	4,836,169	18·1	27,116,208	4,603,688	17·0
Surrey	6,287,851	1,526,647	24·3	6,377,659	1,474,506	23·1
West Sussex	4,985,936	906,329	18·2	5,077,230	874,149	17·2
Croydon	2,117,939	452,523	21·4	2,132,843	429,607	20·1
Kingston and Richmond	2,076,122	475,683	22·9	2,079,613	459,077	22·1
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	4,146,503	800,263	19·3	4,221,855	774,851	18·4
South West Thames	19,614,351	4,161,444	21·2	19,889,200	4,012,190	20·2
Dorset	5,060,355	815,042	16·1	5,205,630	784,249	15·1
Hampshire	10,620,014	2,163,583	20·4	10,871,595	2,095,593	19·3
Wiltshire	3,370,352	712,109	21·1	3,444,502	692,623	20·1
Isle of Wight	1,003,261	162,154	16·2	1,027,719	157,997	15·4
Wessex	20,053,982	3,852,889	19·2	20,549,446	3,730,462	18·2
Berkshire	4,510,779	1,117,376	24·8	4,625,941	1,081,873	23·4
Buckinghamshire	3,656,942	895,191	24·5	3,742,879	863,281	23·1
Northamptonshire	3,592,195	740,776	20·6	3,676,666	713,415	19·4
Oxfordshire	2,752,473	671,793	24·4	2,826,551	653,246	23·1
Oxford	14,512,389	3,425,135	23·6	14,872,037	3,311,816	22·3
Avon	6,390,596	1,257,301	19·7	6,502,170	1,207,801	18·6
Cornwall	3,078,878	481,932	15·7	3,180,072	465,614	14·6
Devon	7,633,769	1,223,816	16·0	7,848,651	1,188,226	15·1
Gloucestershire	3,087,228	642,122	20·8	3,158,325	626,206	19·8
Somerset	2,943,809	541,796	18·4	3,009,379	524,533	17·4
South Western	23,134,280	4,146,966	17·9	23,698,597	4,012,379	16·9
Hereford and Worcestershire	4,113,740	812,683	19·8	4,203,161	793,452	18·9
Salop	2,600,082	466,427	17·9	2,617,820	450,264	17·2
Staffordshire	7,579,951	1,422,494	18·8	7,736,986	1,364,350	17·6
Warwickshire	3,240,435	639,082	19·7	3,284,385	611,940	18·6
Birmingham	9,288,033	1,145,009	12·3	9,401,661	1,071,959	11·4
Coventry	2,731,192	408,062	14·9	2,735,711	376,780	13·8
Dudley	2,324,858	423,633	18·2	2,349,260	406,447	17·3
Sandwell	2,869,891	392,390	13·7	2,864,781	357,595	12·5

FPC Name	1989-90 Total	1989-90 Chargeable	1989-90 Percentage	1990-91 Total	1990-91 Chargeable	1990-91 Percentage
Solihull	1,508,560	298,745	19·8	1,531,261	285,528	18·6
Walsall	2,547,769	370,237	14·5	2,530,137	341,679	13·5
Wolverhampton	2,273,563	333,547	14·7	2,272,690	314,026	13·8
West Midlands	41,078,074	6,712,307	16·3	41,527,853	6,374,020	15·3
Cheshire	7,447,839	1,343,351	18·0	7,617,115	1,284,739	16·9
Liverpool	5,202,664	451,909	8·7	5,309,343	418,933	7·9
St. Helens and Knowsley	3,517,069	393,842	11·2	3,628,178	371,783	10·2
Sefton	2,887,641	375,084	13·0	2,961,666	351,658	11·9
Wirral	3,263,855	423,098	13·0	3,344,633	401,672	12·0
Mersey	22,319,068	2,987,284	13·4	22,860,935	2,828,784	12·4
Lancashire	13,019,122	1,927,035	14·8	13,225,919	1,833,966	13·9
Bolton	2,278,039	346,806	15·2	2,327,601	331,371	14·2
Bury	1,709,275	259,782	15·2	1,743,156	247,298	14·2
Manchester	4,466,316	491,264	11·0	4,512,237	458,344	10·2
Oldham	2,094,502	307,895	14·7	2,139,172	284,895	13·3
Rochdale	2,023,600	275,252	13·6	2,063,949	259,195	12·6
Salford	2,505,149	303,759	12·1	2,534,318	281,965	11·1
Stockport	2,433,369	430,941	17·7	2,475,952	417,509	16·9
Tameside	2,003,432	308,615	15·4	2,036,652	290,122	14·2
Trafford	2,192,308	364,438	16·6	2,233,437	349,379	15·6
Wigan	2,912,792	455,527	15·6	2,948,785	438,338	14·9
North Western	37,637,904	5,471,314	14·5	38,241,178	5,192,383	13·6
England	356,364,096	62,019,359	17·4	363,113,060	59,301,074	16·3

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether a chronic asthmatic on invalidity benefit and in receipt of housing benefits and poll tax benefit but below pensionable age is entitled to free prescriptions.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Since 1968, when medical exemptions from prescription charges were first introduced, asthma has not been a condition which of itself attracts free prescriptions. The NHS low income scheme underpins wide-ranging exemption arrangements on grounds of health or status, thus ensuring that no one need be deterred from obtaining any necessary medication for financial reasons.

As a result of the exemption and charge remission arrangements, coupled with the prescription prepayment certificate scheme, less than one item in six dispensed in the NHS attracts a charge. In 1991 100 million more items were dispensed free than in 1979, when one in three attracted a charge.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of employees in his Department; and how many are *(a)* black and *(b)* disabled.

Mr. Dorrell: As at 3 February 1992, there were 4,511[1] people employed by the Department of Health of whom 539[2] were of ethnic minority origin. As at January 1992, 85[3] members of staff were registered disabled. A survey early in 1991 identified a further 61 additional members of staff with a disability who were not registered disabled.

Notes:

[1] Figure obtained from the Department's payroll held by the Information and Technology Systems Agency.

[2] Figure based on questionnaires voluntarily completed by staff.

[3] Figure obtained from the Personnel Computer System which does not include four people on the sheltered placement scheme.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a table showing the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in his Department in each of the grades (i) 1, (ii) 2, (iii) 3, (iv) 4, (v) 5, (vi) 6, (vii) 7, (viii) SEO, (ix) HEO, (x) administrative trainee, (xi) EO, (xii) CO and (xiii) CA.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is set out in the table:

Grade	Men	Women
1	1	0
2	5	2
3	21	5
4	17	7
5	108	55
6	69	17
7	349	154
SEO	224	74
HEO	339	278
AT	5	5
EO	332	482
AO (CO)	322	880
AA (CA)	218	542
Total	2,010	2,501

Note:

Figures obtained from the Department's payroll held by the Information and Technology Systems Agency on 3 February 1992.

Medical Doctors

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans to increase the statutory protection for the title "doctor" as applied in the medical field.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Statutory protection already exists. Any person who wilfully and falsely uses any title, including that of "doctor of medicine", implying that he is registered as a medical practitioner under the Medical Act 1983 is guilty of an offence under section 49 of that Act.

Population Statistics

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the estimated population of *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* England, *(c)* Greater London, *(d)* outer London, *(e)* inner London, *(f)* Manchester, *(g)* Liverpool, *(h)* Birmingham, *(i)* Leeds, *(j)* Sheffield, *(k)* Bristol and *(l)* Glasgow in 1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is as follows:

Estimated resident population *(Thousands)*

Mid-year:—	*1961*	*1971*	*1981*	[1]*1990*
United Kingdom	52,807·4	55,928·0	56,352·2	57,236·2
England	43,561·0	46,411·7	46,820·8	47,837·3
Greater London	7,997·0	7,529·4	6,805·6	6,794·4
Outer London	4,496·0	4,469·7	4,255·4	4,271·2
Inner London	3,481·0	3,059·7	2,550·1	2,523·2
Local Government areas				
Manchester	657·0	553·6	462·7	446·7
Liverpool	741·0	610·2	517·0	462·9
Birmingham	1,179·0	1,106·8	1,020·7	992·8
Leeds	710·0	748·5	717·9	712·2
Sheffield	581·0	578·8	547·8	525·8
Bristol	436·0	432·5	401·2	374·3
Glasgow City	[2]N/A	982·6	774·1	689·2

[1]The latest estimates available relate to mid-1990. They are based upon 1981 Census data, with allowance for subsequent births, deaths, and migration. Estimates for mid-1991 based upon results of the 1991 Census will become available in Autumn this year.

[2]There is no estimate available for 1961 comparable with the figures presented for 1971, 1981, and 1990 relating to the present Glasgow city authority area.

"Confronting Elder Abuse"

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he proposes to take on the report of the social services inspectorate "Confronting Elder Abuse".

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The report is the result of the first phase of a project being undertaken by the social services inspectorate. It describes how staff in two social services authorities responded to referrals about elder abuse in domestic settings. The inspectorate is now working to produce guidance on standards as part of our work programme implementing care in the community and improving standards in service provision for the elderly.

Low-Energy Lighting

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will make it his policy progressively to introduce low-energy lighting in all the buildings operated by his Department.

Mr. Dorrell: It is already the policy and practice of the Department to introduce low-energy lighting as part of its pursuit of improved energy efficiency.

Abortion

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has discussed with his EC counterparts for the harmonisation of provision for abortion within the Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No such proposals have come forward. Arrangements in respect of abortion are the responsibility of each member state.

DEFENCE

Radiation Exposure

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library statistical information about the radiation doses received by *(a)* service personnel and *(b)* civilian workers during refits of the Resolution class submarines.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Radiation dose information is not available in the form requested.

Suicides

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in how many Army regiments there were no suicides in the years 1987 to 1991; and in how many there were more than one suicide.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In the five years 1987-1991 there were no suicides in 33 regiments and six corps of the Regular Army. In the same period there has been more than one suicide in nine corps and eight regiments.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make it his policy that all reports of investigations into suicides are examined centrally, that all regiments where there are more than two suicides a year are visited by an independent investigator and that an annual report is made to Parliament on forces' suicides; (2) if he will investigate whether bullying was a factor in any suicide in the armed forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All suicides in the armed forces are thoroughly investigated and there are no plans to change present procedures. Investigations completed into suicides committed since 1987 do not show bullying to have been a factor. Statistical information on suicides is contained in the report on "Annual Health Tables: Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force". Arrangements have been made to place the reports for 1990 and future years in the Library of the House.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give for the *(a)* Royal Navy and Royal Marines, *(b)* the Army and *(c)* the Royal Air Force for each of the years 1987 to 1991 (i) the number of suicides and (ii) the number of personnel; and if he will express the suicides as the number per 100,000 personnel.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the right hon. Member.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will detail the investigatory procedure that is carried out when a suicide occurs in the Army.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The suspected suicide of a member of the Army in the United Kingdom would be the subject of a coroner's inquest. The coroner would expect to receive a report on an investigation of the case by the civil police assisted where appropriate by the special investigation branch—SIB—of the Royal Military police.

Suspected suicides of military personnel overseas are investigated by the SIB. A copy of any SIB report is invariably given to the commanding officer of the unit concerned.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, columns *454-56*, if he will investigate the reasons for the level of suicides in the Royal Engineers and the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. The level of suicides in the Royal Engineers and the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers is not significantly higher than in other parts of the Army.

Search and Rescue

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will complete his review of search and rescue facilities prior to 9 April.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not yet possible to say when the review will be completed.

Low-Energy Lighting

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make it his policy progressively to introduce low-energy lighting in all the buildings operated by his Department.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This is already the policy of the Ministry of Defence, where it is practical to do so.

Russian Defence System

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's latest assessment of the operational effectiveness of Russia's anti-ballistic missile defences.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 13 November 1991, *Official Report*, columns *613-14*.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with members of the Russian Government concerning *(a)* the future deployment of additional Russian anti-ballistic missiles and *(b)* the enhancement of existing Russian anti-ballistic missiles.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the number of the former Soviet Union's early warning radars sited outside Russian territory.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are six ballistic missile early warning sites located outside Russian territory. One of these is in the independent republic of Latvia; there are two sites in the Ukraine and one each in Azerbaijan, Byelorussia and Kazakhstan.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures his Department is taking to prevent the proliferation and deployment of anti-ballistic missiles around the world.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Transfers of anti-missile missiles and related technology from the United Kingdom are subject to rigorous national export controls. Such systems or elements of them may also be subject to the international missile technology control regime. United States and Russian ABM deployments are subject to the 1972 ABM treaty.

Range Facilities, Benbecula

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans either to develop or to reduce the range facilities at Balivanich, Benbecula.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are currently no plans to develop or to reduce the range facilities at the Royal Artillery ranges, Hebrides. Range requirements are, however, kept under review.

Trident

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria his Department will apply in determining the level at which the United Kingdom's strategic nuclear warheads will be deployed on the Trident fleet.

Mr. Alan Clark: Trident will deploy the minimum number of warheads necessary to provide effective deterrence, presenting the prospect of damage that no aggressor could find acceptable.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the latest statistics for unemployment in the Durham area for those aged *(a)* under 18, *(b)* 18 to 40 and *(c)* over 40 years.

Mr. Jackson: The information, for the City of Durham parliamentary constituency, is contained in the table and can also be obtained from the NOMIS database system in the Library.

Unemployed Claimants in the City of Durham
January 1992

Age Group	*Total*[1]
Under 18	3
18 to 39	2,360
40 and over	1,028

[1] The figures are on the unadjusted basis.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of persons employed *(a)* in manufacturing industry and *(b)* in service industries for each year since 1981.

Mr. Jackson: The information relating to employees in employment is shown in the table:

United Kingdom (Thousands) Seasonally Adjusted

September each year	*Manufacturing*	*Services*
1981	6,148	13,414
1982	5,769	13,384
1983	5,485	13,570
1984	5,402	13,873

September each year	Manufacturing	Services
1985	5,371	14,117
1986	5,200	14,317
1987	5,176	14,693
1988	5,217	15,340
1989	5,215	15,663
1990	5,147	15,826
1991	4,795	15,495

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate he makes for each year since 1979 of *(a)* the total available work force, namely all those of working age regardless of whether they were in work or not, and *(b)* the percentage of the population which was not in work regardless of whether they were looking for work.

Mr. Jackson: The available estimates from the labour force survey are given in the following table.

Population of working age and percentage not in Employment 1979-90 Great Britain

	Population of working age[1] Thousands	Percentage not in employment[2]
1979	31,966	26·6
1981	32,463	29·9
1983	32,861	32·4
1984	33,125	31·6
1985	33,301	30·7
1986	33,425	30·6
1987	33,620	29·8
1988	33,750	27·7
1989	33,851	25·6
1990	33,922	25·1

[1] Men aged 16-64 and women aged 16-59.
[2] Unemployed (on ILO definition) plus economically inactive as a percentage of population of working age.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women registered as unemployed in the Tooting constituency on 18 February.

Mr. Jackson: In January 1992, the latest available date, there were 4,325 men and 1,636 women claimant unemployed in the Tooting parliamentary constituency, on the unadjusted basis. Figures for February 1992 will be released on 19 March 1992.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women under the age of 21 years who were registered as unemployed in the London borough of Wandsworth on 18 February.

Mr. Jackson: Unemployment figures by age are only available on a quarterly basis and are based on particular age bands. In January 1992, the latest available date, there were 561 male and 301 female unemployed claimants aged under 20 years in the London borough of Wandsworth.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many jobs were on offer at each jobcentre in the Leeds metropolitan district in each month since January 1990 showing totals *(a)* for the Leeds metropolitan district as a whole and *(b)* for each jobcentre.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the numbers of people now registered as unemployed in the Greater London area who have been out of work for periods of up to three months, six months, nine months, one year, two years, three years or longer.

Mr. Jackson: The latest available information, relating to January 1992, is contained in the following table and can also be obtained from the NOMIS database system in the Library.

Claimant unemployment by duration in Greater London January 1992[1]

Duration of unemployment	Number of unemployed
Up to 3 months	108,949
3 to 6 months	78,186
6 to 9 months	54,548
9 to 12 months	44,000
1 to 2 years	68,019
2 to 3 years	17,054
Over 3 years	23,288

[1] Unemployment figures by duration are produced quarterly and are on the unadjusted basis.

Sheltered Placement Scheme

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the review of the payment arrangements for the sheltered placement scheme.

Mr. Jackson: The Employment Service is conducting a review into the arrangements for current and capital funding for both the sheltered placement scheme and sheltered workshops. The review was proposed in the consultative document "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities" and received widespread support. Proposals for new arrangements will be put for consultation as soon as possible.

Employment Action

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the best information he has, for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, separately for male and female, showing how many people have entered employment action and how many were participating in employment action in December 1991 and in January and February 1992.

Mr. Jackson: The tables show the number of people receiving employment action allowances as at each count date, plus the number starting to receive an allowance in the month ending at each count date. Information is not yet available for February. The figure for allowance starts is not available separately for men and women.

Table 1
Employment action: allowance starts in month

Employment service region	Period ending on 12 December 1991 Total men and women	Period ending on 9 January 1992 Total men and women
London and South East	380	318
South West	203	103
West Midlands	257	102
East Midlands	326	170
Yorkshire and Humberside	352	137

Employment service region	Period ending on 12 December 1991 Total men and women	9 January 1992 Total men and women
North West	410	170
Northern	289	110
Wales	266	113
England and Wales	2,483	1,223
Scotland	213	132
Great Britain	2,696	1,355

Source: Employment Service.

Table 2
Employment action: Receiving allowances on count date

Employment service region	Count date 12 December 1991 Total	Men	Women	9 January 1992 Total	Men	Women
London and South East	626	493	133	962	763	199
South West	337	293	44	409	339	70
West Midlands	429	377	52	503	441	62
East Midlands	528	458	70	663	574	89
Yorkshire and Humberside	710	599	111	792	669	123
North West	790	696	94	904	792	112
Northern	503	427	76	583	500	83
Wales	524	502	22	600	575	25
England and Wales	4,447	3,845	602	5,416	4,653	763
Scotland	263	236	27	381	343	38
Great Britain	4,710	4,081	629	5,797	4,996	801

Source: Employment service.

Employment Service

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, how many unemployed people have been referred to restart courses by employment service counsellors since June 1991; how many of them were unemployed for over two years; how many attended and completed the course; what were the outcomes of the participants; how many had benefit penalties imposed for not attending or failing to complete their attendance at the restart course; and if he will make a statement;

(2) for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, how many unemployed people have taken part in the job interview guarantee scheme since September 1991; and how many participants have secured full-time employment with their sponsoring employer;

(3) how many people, for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, have attended a restart interview since 1 April 1991; and what were the results of those interviews, broken down in the same way as the reply given in his answer to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee) of 18 December 1990, *Official Report*, column *148;*

(4) for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, since September 1991, how many people have joined job clubs; how many have left; how many leavers got jobs; how many entered another positive outcome; and if he will give the information broken down by the ethnic origin and gender of participants;

(5) for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, how many unemployed people have participated in job interview guarantee work trials since September 1991; and how many participants have got full-time employment with their work trial employer.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Lone Parents (Training)

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his best estimate, for Great Britain, for each region and for each TEC or LEC, of the number of employment training trainees who are lone parents and have entered the scheme under the lone parent eligibility route; how many are receiving child care allowances; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: This information is not held centrally. Training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies are required to deliver programmes that meet the needs of all their client groups. It is for the training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies to determine which trainee groups, such as lone parents, they support with child care.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in his Department in each of grades (i) 1, (ii) 2, (iii) 3, (iv) 4, (v) 5, (vi) 6, (vii) 7, (viii) SEO, (ix) HEO, (x) administrative trainee, (xi) EO, (xii) CO and (xiii) CA.

Mr. Jackson: The information is set out in the table.

Representation of men and women by grade in the Employment Department group at 1 April 1991

Permanent staff in post by grade band
All staff (administrative and specialist)

Grade group	Male	Female	Total
Grade 1	2·0	0·0	2·0
Grade 2	4·0	1·0	5·0
Grade 3	26·0	2·0	28·0
Grade 4	18·0	0·0	18·0
Grade 5	142·0	28·0	170·0
Grade 6	253·5	35·5	289·0
Grade 7	955·5	132·0	1,087·5
SEO	1,370·5	386·0	1,756·5
HEO	2,939·0	1,886·0	4,825·0

Grade group	Male	Female	Total
AT	2·0	1·0	3·0
EO	5,510·5	8,779·5	14,290·0
AO	5,805·5	17,214·0	23,019·5
AA	707·5	2,106·0	2,813·5

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total number of employees in his Department; and how many are *(a)* black and *(b)* disabled.

Mr. Jackson: The total number of employees on 1 April 1991 was 52,784. At the same date there were 2,564 who classified themselves as of ethnic minority origin and 1,688·5 full-time equivalents who were registered as disabled.

Trade Union Elections

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from Mrs. Pamela Wilkins and the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers about the result of an election to the executive committee of the former National Union of Seamen; how many representations he has received about electoral fraud in the trade unions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. and learned Friend, the Secretary of State for Employment has received no representations about that particular election. However, continuing public concern about electoral fraud in trade unions led to the proposals in the Green Paper "Industrial Relations in the 1990s", Cm. 1602, which would help ensure that the basic right of union members to free and fair elections is effectively protected. The Government announced on 28 January that they intend to bring forward legislation to put those proposals into effect.

Low-Energy Lighting

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will make it his policy progressively to introduce low-energy lighting in all the buildings operated by his Department.

Mr. Forth: As part of the energy efficiency campaign on teh Government estate, it is already the Department's policy to install energy-efficient lighting.

Earnings

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the earnings, expressed as percentages, of *(a)* young men under 18 years and *(b)* young women under 18 years, compared with those aged 18 years and over, in 1979 and at the latest convenient date.

Mr. Forth: Information on the average gross weekly earnings of men and women aged under 18 and aged 18 and over, in April 1979 and April 1991, is published in table 124 of part E of the new earnings survey reports for those years.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many full-time males, part-time males, full-time females and part-time females in employment in the Leeds metropolitan district council earn less than £3·40 per hour.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 25 November 1991, *Official Report*, at column *392*.

Wages Councils

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his latest estimate of the effect the removal of wages council legal protection for young people has had on low pay and youth unemployment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Since 1986 young people have no longer been subject to the minimum rates of pay decided by wages councils. The average earnings of young people have continued to increase in real terms and the greater flexibility resulting from the removal of wage restrictions will have improved their job prospects. However, we have no information which distinguishes between the effects of wages council reforms and other factors in the labour market on young people's pay.

Wages Inspectors

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many establishments since 1979 have been found to be underpaying their workers and how many prosecutions have taken place; how many wages inspectors are currently in post and how many establishments they cover; and what was the position in 1979.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is as follows:

Establishments underpaying

	Number
1979	10,969
1980	12,154
1981	10,074
1982	9,269
1983	9,842
1984	9,461
1985	9,064
1986	8,205
1987	4,443
1988	5,597
1989	5,528
1990	5,205
1991	n/a

n/a = not yet available.

Total prosecutions (including prosecutions for underpayment)

	Number
1979	12 (9)
1980	8 (8)
1981	10 (8)
1982	7 (4)
1983	2 (2)
1984	2 (2)
1985	2 (2)
1986	3 (2)
1987	8 (4)
1988	11 (10)
1989	10 (9)
1990	9 (5)
1991	17 (15)

Wages inspectors in post

January 1979	*January 1992*
158	65

Establishments covered

1979	[1] *1990*
390,464	395,181

[1] Latest available.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Short Money

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is the current level of financial support provided via Short money to the Opposition parties.

Mr. MacGregor: Following the resolution of the House on 21 June 1988, payments are made at a scale of £2,550 for every seat won by each party at the preceding general election, plus £5·10 for every 200 votes cast for its candidates. To qualify for such assistance, a party is required either to have won at least two seats at the general election or, if only one seat has been won, to have received at least 150,000 votes.

Special Standing Committees

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is his policy towards an extension of the use of Special Standing Committees to examine legislation prior to Second Reading.

Mr. MacGregor: It would be quite inappropriate for detailed consideration of a Bill to take place before the principle had been agreed at Second Reading.

Select Committees

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is his policy towards the Departmental Selection Committees being allowed to play a consultative role in the regular legislative process.

Mr. MacGregor: In its report on the working of the Select Committee system—second report, Session 1989-90—the Procedure Committee did not favour a legislative function for Select Committees related to Government Departments. Nor do I.

Office Cost Allowance

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is the present level of office cost allowance for Back-Bench Members.

Mr. MacGregor: The maximum office costs allowance payable to a Member of the House of Commons is £28,986 for the year beginning 1 April 1991, with an additional £2,899—10 per cent.—available for employer pension contributions of staff employed.

Members' Offices

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee (1) how many rooms are currently available as hon. Members' offices in the Palace of Westminster and other buildings in the parliamentary estate;

(2) when he expects there to be a sufficient number of offices available to enable each hon. Member to have an offices of his/her own.

Mr. Ray Powell: There are at present 294 rooms in the Palace available for Members. A further 236 are located elsewhere in the parliamentary estate. It is expected that, once the phase 2 building is commissioned, every Member who wants a room of his or her own will be able to have one. The timetable for the opening of that building is one of the issues addressed in the report of the Accommodation and Works Committee, due to be published on 27 February.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Library Staff

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what is *(a)* the total number of staff in the House of Commons Library, *(b)* the total number of staff in the research division of the Commons Library and *(c)* the number of research staff in the defence and foreign affairs section of the Library.

Mr. Beith: The current complement of staff in the Department of the Library, which includes the Vote Office, is 197·5; of that number 52 are employed in the research division and a further 12 in the international affairs and defence section. From 5 April, the total for the international affairs and defence section will be increased to 13.

Select Committees

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what is the financial level of support available to each of the departmental Select Committees for the recruitment of the services of specialist advisers.

Mr. Beith: A total sum of £257,000 is available in sub-head A.2 (Department of the Clerk of the House) of the vote for House of Commons: administration (class XIX A, vote 1) in the current financial year to meet the fees and other costs of specialist advisers appointed to the Select Committees of the House. The House of Commons Commission does not impose any financial limit on individual Select Committees for the services provided by specialist advisers.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Further Education

11. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from further education colleges about his policies for further and adult education.

Mr. Eggar: A large number of representations were received from further education colleges on the proposals set out in the White Paper "Education and Training for the 21st Century" (Cm 1536).

National Curriculum

12. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress is being made on the implementation of the national curriculum.

Mr. Eggar: The final subjects in the national curriculum —art, music and physical education—will be introduced on time this September in line with the timetable we set in 1989 and have kept to ever since.

Research Funding

13. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what basis future research funding will be assessed for those polytechnics that become universities.

Mr. Alan Howarth: All higher education institutions will be able to compete for funding for basic and strategic research on the basis of assessed quality. The Universities Funding Council has consulted all institutions on the criteria for its forthcoming research assessment exercise.

Student Unions

14. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received about the closed shop in local student unions.

Mr. Alan Howarth: During the course of the consultations initiated by the Government on student unions, my right hon. and learned Friend has received a variety of representations for and against automatic membership of student unions.

Grant-maintained Schools

15. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has for the extension of grant-maintained status to all schools.

Mr. Eggar: The current arrangements by which schools may apply for grant-maintained status following a ballot of parents are proving very successful. We have no plans to change them. In time I expect grant-maintained status to become the norm for secondary schools in particular.

17. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many maintained schools have so far *(a)* applied for and *(b)* been granted grant-maintained status; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: As at 18 February 1992, 288 schools had applied for grant-maintained status and 199 had been approved, with 55 awaiting decision.

18. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many secondary schools have now been approved for grant-maintained status; and how many applications are still under consideration.

Mr. Eggar: As at 18 February, 174 secondary schools had been approved for grant-maintained status and 35 applications were still under consideration.

Grammar Schools

16. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many grammar schools, whether local education authority provided or grant maintained, there are in the county of Kent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: There are 35 grammar schools in Kent, of which 29 are local authority maintained and six are grant maintained.

Teacher Training

19. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the future of teacher training.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I intend to make teacher training, primary and secondary, much more school based. I issued a consultation document on the reform of postgraduate training for secondary school teaching on 28 January. The consultation period will last until the end of March. I have also asked the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education to advise me on the implications for primary teacher training of the recently published discussion paper on curriculum organisation and classroom practice in primary schools.

School Repairs

20. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has to deal with the backlog of outstanding repairs in schools.

21. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has to deal with the backlog of outstanding repairs in schools.

Mr. Fallon: We are already providing huge capital resources. More than £700 million is available for maintained school buildings in 1992-93, an increase of nearly 15 per cent. on the year before, and 35 per cent. above 1991. In addition local education authorities are free to top up their education annual capital guidelines from the overall capital resources at their disposal. It is for them to set expenditure levels and priorities and to use their resources efficiently.

22. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will provide specific funding for the repair and maintenance of schools in the city of Leicester.

Mr. Fallon: It is not open to the Secretary of State to provide specific funding for such work at county and controlled schools. It is for the local education authority to decide which projects to fund from the capital resources available to it, including education annual capital guidelines made available by my right hon. and learned Friend.

Grant aid for external repairs and for capital work at voluntary-aided schools is available on application in the normal way.

School Budgets

23. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from headteachers about the effect of the standard spending assessment on school budgets for the forthcoming year.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend has received a number of letters from headteachers about education's share of the local authority grant settlement.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

24. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the pupil-teacher ratio in 1991; and what was the figure in 1979.

Mr. Fallon: The overall pupil-teacher ratios in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in England in January 1991 and January 1979 were 17.20 and 18.95 respectively.

Education Spending, North Yorkshire

25. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent per pupil in north Yorkshire in 1987 and in the current year.

Mr. Fallon: In 1986-87, school-based spending in north Yorkshire was on average some £1,055 per nursery, primary and secondary school pupil. In 1989-90, the latest year for which information on actual spending is available, the figure was some £1,390. That represents a real terms increase of 9 per cent.

Pupil Placements

26. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will estimate how many pupils are expected to be receiving an education next term in grant-maintained schools or city technology colleges or via the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Eggar: Next term, we estimate there will be some 8,000 pupils at CTCs, around 160,000 pupils at grant-maintained schools and 27,400 pupils benefiting from the assisted places scheme.

London Football Clubs

27. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consultations he has had on the effect of the implementation of the Taylor report on first division football clubs in London.

Mr. Atkins: I am aware of the concerns of a number of first division clubs about the implementation of the Taylor report but have had no specific consultations with London clubs.

Teachers

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish the cost in each of the last five years of the campaign to recruit teachers.

Mr. Fallon: The teacher recruitment advertising campaign has run for only two years. The costs are:

	£
1990-91	2,200,000
1991-92	2,392,000

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in his Department in each of grades (i) 1, (ii) 2, (iii) 3, (iv) 4, (v) 5, (vi) 6, (vii) 7, (viii) SEO, (ix) HEO, (x) administrative trainee, (xi) EO, (xii) CO and (xiii) CA.

Mr. Atkins: The number of full-time equivalent men and women in each grade on 1 February 1992 was:

Grade	*Male*	*Female*
1–3	19	0
4	6	3
5	95	26
6	304	111
7	138	49
SEO	51	31
HEO	154	134
Administrative Trainee	5	0
EO	207	197
AO	132	335
AA	77	160

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the total number of employees in his Department; and how many are *(a)* black and *(b)* disabled.

Mr. Atkins: On 1 April 1991 the Department employed a headcount total of 2,838 staff of whom 261 respondents to the ethnic monitoring survey were of ethnic minority origins.

The latest figures provided on registered disabled staff relate to 1 June 1991 at which time there were 70 registered disabled staff out of a total of 2,679 full-time equivalent staff. There are other staff in the Department with disabilities who have chosen not to register and are not included in the above figure.

Reading Standards

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many children under seven years of age have not reached a satisfactory standard of reading; and what is his estimate of the numbers who would benefit from a child-centred recovery scheme.

Mr. Eggar: Pupil's reading abilities are tested under the national curriculum at the end of key stage 1 when most pupils are aged seven. The 1991 national tests revealed that 28 per cent. of seven-year-olds had not yet reached level 2 in reading, the target set for typical seven-year-olds.

It is for individual schools to decide how to tackle pupils' reading needs. However, we are undertaking a national trial of the reading recovery programme to be conducted in some 200 inner-city schools in 21 local authorities, and focusing on children who, at the age of six, are experiencing difficulty in learning to read and write. About £10 million is planned to be supported with specific grant under the grants for education support and training programme over the three years 1992-93 to 1994-95 for this and other reading initiatives for inner-city schools.

Music

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the extent to which his draft orders for music in the national curriculum will meet his original intention of achieving a broad and balanced curriculum.

Mr. Eggar: The Government's plans for the music curriculum for children aged five to 14 will ensure that all pupils for the first time receive a rigorous and balanced musical education as an integral part of a broad national curriculum. Our plans for increasing the choice of study

available for 14 to 16-year-olds will ensure that pupils have the opportunity to follow their own particular inclinations and strengths, while still being required to pursue a broader and more balanced curriculum than hitherto.

Institute Laue Langevin

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the future of British participation in the Institute Laue Langevin at Grenoble.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Further to my answer to the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) on 28 November 1991, *Official Report*, column *590*, about the review by the Science and Engineering Research Council of neutron science, formal notice was given on 16 December 1991 of the United Kingdom's intention to terminate the present Institut Laue Langevin (ILL) convention with effect from 1 January 1994, and of our wish to replace it with a new convention from that date. Discussions on this are now in progress with French and German partners in ILL.

NALGO

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met members of NALGO to discuss expenditure on education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend has not had any such meeting.

Low-Energy Lighting

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make it his policy progressively to introduce low-energy lighting in all the buildings operated by his Department.

Mr. Atkins: Practically all the Department's buildings are equipped with low-energy lighting. It is the Department's policy progressively to install energy efficient lighting in premises where such equipment is not already fitted.

Capital Expenditure, Newham

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will state the capital expenditure on education by Her Majesty's Government in the London borough of Newham since June 1979.

Mr. Eggar: The available data indicate that capital allocations for education within Newham LEA since 1981-82 amount to more than £43 million.

European Community and Sport

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the Government's position in response to the European Commission's communication on the European Community and sport.

Mr. Atkins: The Government's position is set out in an explanatory memorandum which I submitted to Parliament on 14 February.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Fair Employment

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table to show the number of vacancies filled in each of the education and library board headquarters, in each of the last available three years, the number of applications received by each board in each of those years, and the number of complaints made under the fair employment legislation in respect of those posts in each year and the number of such complaints which went to a tribunal; how many went to court; what amount of compensation was paid; and how many are still ongoing.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is as follows:

Board	*1989*		*1990*		*1991*	
	Number of vacancies filled	*Number of applications received*	*Number of vacancies filled*	*Number of applications received*	*Number of vacancies filled*	*Number of applications received*
Belfast	102	585	105	1,249	98	823
North-Eastern	64	463	81	762	68	458
South-Eastern	82	949	73	1,228	32	267
Southern	41	467	82	1,194	120	1,924
Western	93	1,065	77	650	96	683

In 1989 one complaint against the Southern board was taken to the Fair Employment Agency which upheld the board's decision. In 1990 two complaints were made to the North-Eastern board but went no further. In 1991 two complaints against the Southern board were taken to the Fair Employment Commission, one is now awaiting a tribunal hearing, the other, together with a third complaint, against the Western board, is still under consideration.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table to show for each of the last three years for which figures are available the number of vacancies filled by the Housing Executive, the number of applications received by the Executive for those posts in each year and the number of complaints made under the fair employment legislation in respect of those posts in each year and the number of such complaints which went to a tribunal; how many went to court; what sums were paid in compensation; and how many are still ongoing.

Mr. Needham: The information available is as follows:

	1990	*1991*
Number of vacancies filled	588	131
Number of applications received	7,000	4,500

I am advised by the chairman of the Housing Executive that there were no complaints in 1989 or 1991. In 1990 four complaints were taken to the Fair Employment Commission which is still considering them.

98. **Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken by the rate collection agency to appoint equality officers to ensure that fair employment legislation and sex discrimination legislation is being adhered to in relation to all staff appointments.

Mr. Needham: The rate collection agency has no responsibility for the appointment of its staff. All permanent appointments to the agency are made by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland which has a full-time equal opportunities officer in its employment.

The recruitment of casual staff by the agency is monitored centrally by the equal opportunities unit of the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what steps have been taken by the area education and library boards to appoint equality officers to ensure that fair employment and sex discrimination legislation is being adhered to in relation to all staff appointments;

(2) what steps have been taken to ensure that persons involved in interview panels in the area education and library boards are adequately briefed about employment legislation to ensure equality under the Fair Employment (NI) Act 1989 and the Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1988.

Dr. Mawhinney: Following the publication of an equal opportunities policy statement in 1989, committing the boards to the principle of equality of opportunity, each board established an equal opportunties unit, in January 1990, to comply with its statutory obligations.

This policy statement is emphasised within the overall training programme for board members, officers of the boards, school governors and members of governing bodies of institutions of further education, including training for membership of selection panels for recruitment and promotion purposes. A guidance memorandum has been issued by the boards to all boards of governors, together with a distance learning package, providing advice on all matters relating to equality of opportunity for persons both employed and seeking employment.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to appoint equality officers to ensure that fair employment and sex discrimination legislation is being adhered to in relation to all staff appointments.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but I have been advised by its chairman that the executive has implemented a number of steps to ensure that the fair employment and sex discrimination legislation is being adhered to in relation to all staff appointments.

An equal opportunities unit was established in 1989 and its staff are trained in the legislation relating to fair employment and sex discrimination. The unit is responsible for monitoring the impact of personnel policies, including recruitment, throughout the organisation and has developed equal opportunities polices in respect of sex, religion and disability. The application of policies which have been approved by the board of the Executive and agreed with the staff trade union, NIPSA, is monitored by the unit.

The unit has also organised several seminars to ensure that staff are aware of the policies and that they are implemented effectively.

The Executive has also set up an equality working group, which is comprised of a wide spectrum of Executive staff from across the Province, and participates in the employers equality group which has representatives from some of the major employers in the Province.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken by each district council to appoint equality officers to ensure that fair employment and sex discrimination legislation is being adhered to in relation to all staff appointments.

Mr. Needham: District councils are employers in their own right and it is a matter, therefore, for each council to ensure that it complies with the statutory requirements of the fair employment and sex discrimination legislation.

I understand, however, that every council, in recognition of the importance of the requirements, has allocated responsibility for monitoring equality of opportunity to an officer at chief officer level.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to ensure that persons involved in interview panels in the Northern Ireland Tourist Board are adequately briefed about employment legislation to ensure equality under the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 and the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1988.

Mr. Needham: Fair employment and sex discrimination legislation are emphasised in training programmes for all board staff likely to be involved in selection interviewing. In advance of selection interviews panel members receive written guidance on good practice and are fully briefed on their responsibilities.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to ensure that persons involved in interview panels in the rate collection agency are adequately briefed about employment legislation to ensure equality under the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 and the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1988.

Mr. Needham: The Rate Collection Agency does not at present have responsibility for the convening of interview panels to fill posts within the agency. All full-time appointments to the agency are made by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland and where recruitment of such staff is involved this is undertaken by recruitment branch of the Department of Finance and Personnel.

In so far as recruitment for casual employment is concerned this is undertaken by the agency's own staff by way of interview panels normally consisting of two persons. Only those staff who have received training in recruitment interviewing by the Department of the

Environment's training branch are eligible to sit on such panels. This training includes briefing on employment legislation in Northern Ireland.

Promotion to higher grades is also presently the responsibility of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland. All agency staff who meet the eligibility criteria for promotion are entitled to be considered and all promotion panels are set up by the Department of the Environment in accordance with established civil service procedures.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to ensure that persons involved in interview panels in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive are adequately briefed about employment legislation to ensure equality under the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 and the Sex Discrimination Order (Northern Ireland) 1988.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but I have been advised by its chairman that all staff involved in interviewing either internal or external candidates for posts in the executive must complete a three-day training course. The course contains specific elements relating to equal opportunities issues including fair employment and sex discrimination legislation. Participants are given an overview of the legislation, its purpose and the need for monitoring, together with illustration of types of direct and indirect discriminatory practices.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to ensure that persons involved in interview panels in district councils are adequately briefed about employment legislation to ensure equality under the Fair Employment (NI) Act 1989 and the Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1988.

Mr. Needham: Under section 40 of the Local Government Act (NI) 1972 the Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland is responsible for establishing a code of procedure for securing fair and equal consideration of applications to district councils by persons seeking to be employed by them.

The staff commission has established an equality of opportunity working group to review the equality of opportunity policies and practices of district councils. It is anticipated that the staff commission will produce a code of practice on recruitment and selection in May this year for adoption by all councils. The code will require all those involved in interview panels to be properly trained on all aspects of fair employment and sex discrimination legislation. Training will be undertaken by the staff commission and the Public Service Training Council.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to appoint equality officers who will ensure that fair employment legislation and sex discrimination legislation is being adhered to in relation to all staff appointments.

Mr. Needham: The responsibilities of the board's personnel manager include those of equality officer.

Improvement and Repair Grants

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many applications for improvement grants have been *(a)* made, *(b)* approved and *(c)* refused in each year from 1 April 1988, and from 1 April to 31 December 1991, at (i) Lisburn and (ii) Newry offices;

(2) how many applications for repair grants have been *(a)* made, *(b)* approved and *(c)* refused in each year from 1 April 1988, and from 1 April to 31 December 1991 at (i) Lisburn and (ii) Newry offices.

Mr. Needham: These are matters for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but the chairman has advised me that information about the number of cases refused is not recorded and that details of the number of applications received is not held in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The number of applications approved are as follows:

Year	*Improvement Grants*		*Repair Grants*	
	Lisburn	*Newry*	*Lisburn*	*Newry*
1988-89	158	305	318	181
1989-90	127	195	330	205
1990-91	153	192	200	170
[1]1991-92	142	172	207	130

[1] To 31 December 1991.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications for improvement and repair grants have not been approved due to the current moratorium placed on all capital expenditure at (i) Lisburn and (ii) Newry offices.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but the chairman has informed me that approval of applications for improvement and repair grants has not been affected by the temporary pause in spending on new capital contracts and some maintenance works.

Construction Industry

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many jobs he estimates to have been lost in the construction industry as a result of the moratorium placed on capital expenditure in early December 1991.

Mr. Needham: It is not possible to assess accurately the impact on jobs in the construction industry of the temporary pause in spending on new capital contracts and some maintenance works. The overall employment effects are likely to be minimal as the total volume of public expenditure has not been reduced.

Housing Associations

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list new housing associations in Northern Ireland registered since 31 December 1987; and how many habitations are provided by each of them.

Mr. Needham: The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland has registered only one housing association since 31 December 1987. The Oaklee housing association, which was registered on 4 November 1991, does not currently provide any units of habitation, but it

will take over the properties currently owned by the James Butcher and Nih housing associations when the merger of these two associations is completed on 6 April 1992. The combined stock will consist of 1,473 self-contained dwellings and 254 bed spaces in shared accommodation.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list details of grants and loans made to each unregistered housing association in Northern Ireland by the Housing Executive from 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1991, and from 1 April 1991 to 31 December 1991;

(2) if he will list details of grants and loans made to each housing association in Northern Ireland by the Housing Executive from 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1991, and from 1 April 1991 to 31 December 1991.

Mr. Needham: The chairman of the Housing Executive has advised me that grants to unregistered housing associations in Northern Ireland have been paid as follows:

	1988-89 £	*1989-90* £	*1990-91* £	[1]*1991* £
Glenall Housing Co-operative	—	—	3,750	7,500
Victoria Estates	405	405	405	405

[1] 1 April 1991 to 31 December 1991.

The Housing Executive has not made any loans to unregistered housing associations in the period since 1 April 1988.

No grants or loans have been made to registered housing associations in these periods. Government funding of registered housing associations is channelled through the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland; such details as are available are set out in the answer which I gave the hon. Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder) on 22 October 1991—*Official Report*, columns *554-57*.

Privatisations

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what change there will be to the block vote to Northern Ireland as a result of the privatisation of Harland and Wolff and Shorts.

Dr. Mawhinney: These privatisations do not affect the overall level of resources allocated to the Northern Ireland block, which is adjusted mainly through the operation of the comparability arrangements. Some payments are still to be made to the companies under the privatisation agreements but these will taper off over time.

"The Way Ahead"

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take steps to implement the proposals contained in the Housing Executive document about rural unfitness entitled, "The Way Ahead".

Mr. Needham: Implementation of the proposals contained in "The Way Ahead" is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but I have been advised by the chairman that a number have already been put into practice. This has in some instances required detailed consultation with the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland who will continue to support the executive's contribution to the rural initiative programme by responding as quickly as possible to any remaining policy issues.

Anglo-Irish Conference

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when is the next meeting of the Anglo-Irish ministerial conference.

Dr. Mawhinney: The next meeting of the conference is likely to take place shortly.

EC Programmes

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how the £18 million approved by the European Commission in respect of STRIDE, Prisma and Telematique programmes will be allocated in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The amounts of EC aid allocated to the Northern Ireland programmes are as follows:

£10 million—STRIDE
£4 million—Prisma
£4 million—Telematique

All three programmes will be managed by the Department of Economic Development. Press announcements seeking applications for assistance under the STRIDE measure have already appeared and similar calls for Prisma and Telematique projects will be made shortly.

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have been charged with *(a)* an offence under section 25(2)*(b)* section 25(3)(a) or *(c)* section 25(3)(b) of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* No persons have been charged with an offence under any of these provisions since the coming into force of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991 on 27 August last year.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Frankfurt Exhibition

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give details of support offered by his Department in respect of the Frankfurt international trade exhibition 1992 to the pottery industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department did not provide financial assistance to the pottery industry for this event.

British Technology Group

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has discussed with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals or the heads of the research councils the sale of the British Technology Group.

Mr. Leigh: The DTI consulted with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the United Kingdom

universities about the invitations and advertisements issued in connection with the sale of British Technology Group plc, as required by section 7 of the British Technology Group Act 1991.

Bureaux de Change

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to control exchange rate indications by bureaux de change.

Mr. Lilley: For too long the incomplete and obscure way some signs setting out exchange rate indications are displayed has led to confusion. Regulations I have laid before the House today will enable consumers to compare rates more easily and shop around for the best deal.

The Price Indications (Bureaux de Change) Regulations 1992 mean that exchange rate indications must: give full details of the terms on which transactions will be conducted. Where an operator buys and sells a currency at different rates, or buys and sells travellers cheques at different rates from notes, all rates will have to be given; give full information on commission rates and any other fees, giving them the same degree of prominence as the exchange rates themselves; be easily visible to customers as they approach the premises.

In addition, customers must be given: all information relevant to a particular transaction when they enquire about an exchange rate; receipts setting out details of the transaction, except in the case of some machines; a clear explanation of the basis on which the rate will be determined when currency is ordered for supply at a later date.

Bureaux de change must comply with these regulations which come into force on 18 May 1992.

However, requirements to display the information on fees and commission rates with the same degree of prominence as the exchange rates themselves will take effect on 18 May 1993. This is to allow operators time to modify or replace display equipment.

Financial Services

Mr. Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made by EC member states towards providing for a single market in financial services with respect in particular to cross border branch networks and to cross border investment by one financial institution in another.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* The United Kingdom financial services sector already conducts a great deal of cross-border business either through subsidiaries or under the freedoms enshrined in the treaty of Rome. The single market programme was designed to facilitate this further by allowing insurance companies, banks, building societies and investment firms the ability to conduct business throughout the EC on the basis of home state authorisation.

Political agreement has been reached on a directive creating more freedom in non-life insurance and should be adopted by the Council of Ministers before the summer. Adoption of its sister directive on life assurance is expected by the end of this year.

The adopted second banking co-ordination directive will, from 1 January 1993, enable a credit institution—a bank or a building society in the United Kingdom—to branch and offer services into other member states on the basis of certain agreed minimum standards. The supervisory arrangements to deal with cross-border investment by credit institutions in groups which include a bank will also be covered by the second banking consolidated supervision directive which is expected to be adopted shortly.

Negotiations on the investment services directive, which is intended to allow investment firms to establish branches and provide services throughout the EC subject to minimum standards, are stalled over draft provisions which would impose rules and restrictions on where and how financial transactions are undertaken. The United Kingdom supports the view of a number of member states that these measures would not open the EC investment services market and the directive would, in its current form, hinder the single market in financial services.

Coalfield Areas (Support)

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his statement of 17 February, *Official Report*, column 22, what contact he had with Commissioner Millan concerning the level and scope of the new business support measures in coalfield areas; what amount of financial resources will be concerned; and from what estimate they will be authorised.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 21 February 1992]:* The United Kingdom RECHAR programmes sent to the European Commission in July 1990 all proposed that business support measures should be implemented as part of these programmes.

Implementation was delayed by the delay to the Commission's approval of the programmes in general. We have informed the Commission in outline about the proposed business support measures, which form one part of the programmes to be approved by Commissioner Millan.

I told the House on 17 February, *Official Report*, column 22 that, to contribute to the RECHAR programmes, the Government will shortly be announcing methods of new business support measures of our own to assist small firms in coalfield areas.

Defence Sales

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much, in each of the last five years, of the Export Credits Guarantee Department budget was available to support overseas defence sales.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 21 February 1992]:* No amounts are set aside specifically for defence sales. Ministers announced in June 1988 a facility for providing £1 billion of export credit support for major defence exports, *Official Report*, 28 June 1988, columns *164-65*. While the limit has been largely utilised, this represents only the level of defence sales supported within the terms of the facility.

EC Co-operative Statute

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the organisations that the United Kingdom Government are consulting on the draft European co-operative statute, adopted by the European Commission in December 1991.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 24 February 1992]:* The Government have not yet received a formal translation of the Commission's draft European co-operative statute. Consultation with interested bodies in the United Kingdom will take place as appropriate when we receive a formal proposal.

National Engineering Laboratory

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give details of each external consultancy study undertaken in each of the last five years into the operation of the national engineering laboratory.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 24 February 1992]:* Since the study by Touche Ross Management Consultants, completed in April 1989, there has been no external consultancy study covering the overall operation of NEL.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list all the television advertising campaigns and all other publicity campaigns costing over £100,000 to be carried out by his Department in February, March, April, May or June of the current year.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 24 February 1992]:* I refer to the list of the departmental programmes given to the hon. Member on 1 July 1991, *Official Report*, column *20*. Supporting publicity for those programmes continues, but there are no current plans for television advertising in the period referred to.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Fund

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it a requirement that the statement in "Social Fund Manual" paragraph 5023 be included in all area social fund officers' guidance.

Mr. Scott: We are currently considering the need for extending and amending the existing advice to area social fund officers on the production of their guidance.

Pensioners

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the latest estimates of how many pensioners are *(a)* male, *(b)* female, *(c)* single and *(d)* married, in Great Britain.

Miss Widdecombe: In mid-1990 the estimated number, in thousands, of men and women at state pension age and over in Great Britain was:

	Men	*Women*
Married:	2,536	2,995
Not Married:	987	3,741

Source: OPCS mid-year estimates.

Low-Energy Lighting

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will make it his policy progressively to introduce low-energy lighting in all the buildings operated by his Department.

Mr. Jack: The Department is committed to promoting energy efficiency and this policy was confirmed in the reply given to the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) on 28 January 1991 at column *431-32* and at paragraph 122 of the 1992 departmental report (Cm. 1914), a copy of which is available in the Library.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in Scotland are paying national insurance contributions as self-employed.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is not available separately for Scotland.

Pensions

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column 96, what would be the net cost to the Exchequer of raising the basic state pension in 1992-93 to £59·15 per week for single pensioners and £95·70 per week for married couples on the same basis as given in that answer, after taking into account extra income tax receipts and off-setting savings on expenditure on income-related benefits;

(2) what would be the net cost to the Exchequer, after taking into account higher tax receipts and savings on expenditure on income-related benefits, of increasing the basic state pension in 1992-93 to £59·15 per week for single people and to £94·70 per week for married couples, on the basis that the increased pensions were paid to all regardless of contributory record.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 7 February 1992]:* Information on the savings on income-related benefits is not yet available for 1992-93 in the form requested. However, using existing basic pension rates increased by £5 per week for a single person, giving £57 and £8 per week a married couple, giving £91·25, costings comparable with 1992-93 can be made.

For 1991-92 the gross cost would be £3·9 billion with offsetting savings of £1·0 billion on income-related benefits. Income tax receipts would rise by £0·2 billion. The net cost to the Exchequer would be £2·7 billion. The combined cost of this increase in national insurance contributions to a man on full-time average earnings and his employer would be £5·20 per week in 1991-92.

Pension Rights

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will introduce an early warning system to inform contributors that they need to make back payments on their national insurance contributions to maximise their pension rights; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will produce advice for the public on arrangements for making back-payments of national insurance contributions to help people to maximise their pension rights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 24 February 1992]*: The Department already writes automatically to relevant groups of contributors following the end of any year in which their contribution record is insufficient to count towards basic retirement pension. In addition, the

Department also provides a retirement pension forecast to contributors: they can request a forecast by completing an application form (BR 19) obtainable at local social security offices. The forecast gives details of the pension entitlement based on the national insurance record held. It states the number of qualifying years required in the future to obtain the maximum pension which can be achieved, and offers advice on the payment of additional contributions, if required.

The Contributions Agency has a high level of commitment to provide information and assistance to all its customers. This is shown in the charters recently issued by the agency and I will send the hon. Member copies of these documents.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Ambulance Service

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for the Scottish Ambulance Service, Greater Glasgow area, in April 1991 and December 1991 the number of *(a)* urgent calls and *(b)* emergency calls.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information about the Greater Glasgow area is:

	April 1991	*December 1991*
Number of urgent calls	2,762	2,779
Number of emergency calls	3,415	4,175

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the number of cases currently being considered by the procurator fiscal for fatal accident investigation in which delay in ambulance response from the Scottish Ambulance Service, Greater Glasgow area, is considered a possible factor.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am advised by my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate that no such cases are currently being considered.

Lead Poisoning

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what studies his Department are conducting into the dangers of lead poisoning, especially for children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In January 1992 the chief scientist office of the Scottish Office Home and Health Department approved funding amounting to £27,000 for a one-year study by Dr. Mary Fulton of the University of Edinburgh to determine the impact of treating water to reduce its lead content on the blood lead levels of those children who participated in her earlier research into the influence of blood lead on the ability and attainment of children in Edinburgh.

The health implications of lead are fully recognised by the Government and measures have been taken to reduce lead exposure through petrol, water, industrial emissions and a range of other sources.

Pittenweem Harbour

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he intends to give borrowing consent to Fife regional council for the construction of a breakwater at Pittenweem harbour.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend expects to announce his decisions on capital expenditure consents for local authorities very shortly.

Texts (Efficiency Scrutiny)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the efficiency scrutiny of text creation in the Scottish Office.

Mr. Lang: The efficiency scrutiny was recently completed and I have today placed in the House Library a copy of the scrutiny team's report. It makes a number of recommendations. My Department will now produce an action plan outlining the Scottish Office response to the report.

Candidiasis and Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Eadie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the provision made by each health board in the treatment of candidiasis and myalgic encephalomyelitis; and what is the approximate spend of each health board annually on such treatment.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 24 February 1992]:* Treatment of these conditions is a matter for general practitioners in the first instance. Costs for the treatment of these conditions cannot be identified separately.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the television advertising campaigns and all other publicity campaigns costing over £100,000 to be carried out by his Department in February, March, April, May or June of the current year.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 24 February 1992]:* A television and press publicity campaign on solvent misuse and drug abuse is currently running in Scotland and will continue into March. The cost is £115,000. To date, the only campaign planned for the next financial year is one to promote car crime prevention. It will run on television in April and May at a cost of £110,000.

TRANSPORT

Shipping (North Sea)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to restrict North sea supply vessels to those which sail under the British flag.

Mr. McLoughlin: No. It is our policy to seek the removal of such restrictions elsewhere. Liberalisation of cabotage trade, including offshore supply services, is currently one of our main objectives in the European Community. We believe this to be in the best interests of the British shipping industry as well as of those who use its services.

Blackwall Tunnel

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, as part of the improvements for traffic control and avoidance of delays and congestion in and

around the Blackwall tunnel, he will consider the merits of reverting to the practice of having a heavy duty breakdown vehicle permanently stationed at the north exit of that tunnel.

Mr. Chope: I shall consider the hon. Member's suggestion.

Air Traffic Noise

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider using the noise line statistics when judging the impact of air traffic on local communities.

Mr. McLoughlin: My noble Friend wrote to the hon. Member on this subject on 18 February.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a table showing the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in his Department in each of the grades (i) 1, (ii) 2, (iii) 3, (iv) 4, (v) 5, (vi) 6, (vii) 7, (viii) SEO, (ix) HEO, (x) administrative trainee, (xi) EO, (xii) CO and (xiii) CA.

Mr. McLoughlin: The table shows staff in the Department of Transport and its agencies by grade equivalent and gender. The figures reflect staff in post at 1 April 1991 of 15,984.

DTp staff by grade equivalent at 1 April 1991

Grade	Men	Women	Total
Grade 1	1	0	1
Grade 2	4	0	4
Grade 3	23	0	23
Grade 4	17	0	17
Grade 5	107	9	116
Grade 6	149	6	155
Grade 7	686	69	755
SEO	917	72	989
HEO	1,098	310	1,408
EO	3,122	1,085	4,207
AO	1,597	2,655	4,252
AA	951	3,097	4,048
Other	9	0	9
Total	8,681	7,303	15,984

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total number of employees in his Department; and how many are *(a)* black and *(b)* disabled.

Mr. McLoughlin: The total number of non-industrial staff in post in the Department of Transport, and its agencies, on 1 April 1991 was 15,484. A survey of the ethnic origin of non-industrial staff showed that of the respondents—representing 81 per cent. of the Department—619 were from ethnic minority groups.

MOT Tests

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many MOT tests were conducted in the area of Hawick, Roxburghshire in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Chope: There were 5,595 MOT tests carried out in the Hawick area between January and December 1991.

British Rail Privatisation

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether it is his intention that the provisions of the citizens charter applicable to British Rail will also apply to private sector rail operators after privatisation of the railway;

(2) how many civil servants he estimates will be required to be employed in regulation of safety, access, fares, franchising and service standards monitoring of the railway system after privatisation; and whether their costs will be met by the Exchequer or the railway customer;

(3) to which authority he intends to give responsibiliy for the safety training of railway staff and for testing in professional competence following the privatisation of British Rail;

(4) what obligations he intends to place on private sector operators taking over parts of British Rail to contribute to the work of the Railway Heritage Trust and to continue and expand the community involvement currently undertaken by British Rail;

(5) how he intends introduction of automatic train protection will be financed following the privatisation of British Rail;

(6) to whom he intends to give responsibility for the maintenance of the bridges, viaducts and other structures on closed branch lines following the privatisation of British Rail;

(7) which company or authority he intends to nominate to take over the 50 per cent. share of channel tunnel capacity contracted jointly to British Rail and French Railways following privatisation of British Rail;

(8) how he intends essential safety expenditure will be financed following the privatisation of British Rail;

(9) what arrangements he intends to make for railway research and development following the privatisation of British Rail;

(10) which authority he intends will represent Britain's railways on the International Union of Railways and the Community of European Railways following the privatisation of British Rail;

(11) how he intends to ensure the co-ordination of the planning and publication of timetables and the provision of train service information to customers throughout Great Britain following the privatisation of British Rail.

Mr. Freeman: We shall make known our proposals in due course.

Passenger Transport, South-East

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the total number of passengers (expressed as millions of passenger miles) carried by *(a)* London Underground, *(b)* London Buses, including tendered routes and *(c)* Network SouthEast in each year since 1980.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is given in the table.

Passenger miles (millions)

	London Underground	London bus services[1]	Network SouthEast
1980	2,640	2,579	8,100
1981	2,540	2,500	8,000
1982	2,270	2,320	7,000
1983	2,700	2,436	7,800
1984-85	3,340	2,587	7,400

	London Underground	London bus services[1]	Network SouthEast
1985-86	3,710	2,562	8,100
1986-87	3,862	2,687	8,500
1987-88	3,888	2,786	9,000
1988-89	3,910	2,769	9,400
1989-90	3,738	2,728	9,300
1990-91	3,830	2,713	9,300

[1] Including tendered routes.

Speed Limiters

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he intends to implement the provisions of the recently agreed EC directive requiring the fitment of speed limiters to heavy goods vehicles and passenger-carrying vehicles.

Mr. Chope: The United Kingdom has been ahead of the EC in recognising the road safety and environmental benefits associated with speed limiters. It has been a requirement to fit speed limiters on new coaches since April 1989; and new goods vehicles over 7·5 tonnes maximum weight will have to have limiters fitted from 1 August 1992. In addition, domestic regulations already require existing coaches registered since April 1974 to have speed limiters fitted.

We consulted last year on a proposal to require speed limiters to be fitted to certain types of existing heavy goods vehicles over 16 tonnes, and regulations to implement that initiative will be made shortly. We shall also be introducing regulations requiring that limiters must be secured against tampering only by officially approved centres.

Domestic regulations will need to be amended in due course to accommodate the additional requirements in the EC directive which will effectively limit the maximum speed of the coaches concerned to 65 mph, and the maximum speed of the heavy goods vehicles concerned to 56 mph. The regulations on existing heavy vehicles and coaches will also have to be extended to accommodate the slightly wider requirements of the EC directive. These amendments, which will ensure that domestic legislation satisfies all the EC requirements, will not need to be implemented until 1994 at the earliest.

M6

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current position on the proposed widening of the M6 and the competition for a private sector route in the Birmingham to Manchester corridor.

Mr. Rifkind: I have today announced plans for widening the M6 between junctions 11 and 20 to dual four-lane carriageway at an estimated cost of £450 million. A copy of the press notice setting out the details of what is proposed has been placed in the Library. I have also announced the decision that, for a variety of reasons, ranging from environmental to operational, none of the proposals received in response to the competition for a new privately-funded route in the Birmingham-Manchester corridor are to be taken forward. However, we shall keep under review the scope for involving the private sector further in road provision throughout the network.

In widening the M6, environmental assessment will be carried out and landscaping, planting and noise protection measures will be used extensively. We shall continue to consult local authorities and other interested organisations as we develop designs for widening. We will mount exhibitions to show our designs to the public and enable them to comment, prior to embarking on the normal statutory procedures required for this kind of road improvement.

Birmingham Western Orbital Route

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to announce the next stage of the competition to build a privately funded Birmingham western orbital route.

Mr. Rifkind: I am today inviting pre-qualifying bids for this scheme from the private sector. A notice is being published in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities.

The aim of this pre-qualifying stage is to provide a basis for selecting a limited number of tenderers to avoid wasted tendering effort by the industry. The short-listed candidates will then be invited to tender to design, build, finance and operate the new road as a tolled road under a concession agreement with the Department.

Authorisation for the road scheme will be sought by procedures introduced by the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991. The road will be required to meet the same environmental and safety standards as any public sector scheme and there will be the same opportunity for a public inquiry.

The aim is for the scheme to be completed in the late 1990s, the same target as for the previous public scheme.

Low-Energy Lighting

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make it his policy progressively to introduce low-energy lighting in all the buildings operated by his Department.

Mr. McLoughlin: Guidance on the use of low-energy lighting has been issued throughout this Department and has already been applied in a number of its buildings. Such systems will be progressively introduced where it is cost effective to do so.

Motorway Lighting

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies he has made of the impact of lighting on motorways on the incidence of driver/passenger fatalities and accidents; and with what results.

Mr. Chope: The results of a study undertaken by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory were published in 1987. The study concluded that there does not appear to be any evidence to support an increase in the Department's current assumption of a 30 per cent. reduction in night-time accidents, but the range of uncertainty remains high.

British International Helicopters

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the procedures that were followed when British Airways was privatised with regard to the arrangements entered into

over British International Helicopters; and what steps were taken to preserve the interests of the Exchequer and the staff of British International Helicopters.

Mr. McLoughlin: British International Helicopters, formerly British Airways Helicopters Ltd. (BAHL), a subsidiary of British Airways, was sold in September 1986, prior to the privatisation of British Airways. The decision to sell BAHL and the details of the negotiations were commercial matters for the British Airways Board.

Aberdeen Airways

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent application has been received for the operation of Aberdeen Airways; and what factors are taken into account in considering such applications.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Civil Aviation Authority has referred the case of Aberdeen Airways to the Secretary of State for Transport under section 66(3) of the Civil Aviation Act 1982 for a decision as to whether the airline's air transport licences should be revoked. All such cases are considered on their merits.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 26 February 1992

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Legal Aid

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General what proposals he has to secure the continuing availability of criminal legal aid in the magistrates courts of rural areas in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor is committed to ensuring that criminal legal aid services in the magistrates courts continue to be widely available. In 1990-91 the Legal Aid Board paid 440,000 bills in respect of criminal legal aid in the magistrates courts. In addition to this, just under 230,000 defendants were assisted under the magistrates courts duty solicitor scheme. This commitment extends to all areas of the country and there are no separate provisions for rural areas.

TRANSPORT

British Rail (Investment)

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those investment projects for which British Rail is awaiting his approval; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: On 6 February the British Rail chairman sought authority for investment in 550 fully enclosed car carrying wagons for the import and export of finished cars via the channel tunnel.

A414, Danbury

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *610-11*, what is the latest progress on approving speed limits on the A414 through the village of Danbury; and when approval by his Department is expected to be given.

Mr. Chope: We are still waiting to hear from Essex county council concerning various legal issues. I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as I am able to report progress.

ENVIRONMENT

River Wear (Pollution)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the pollution incidents on the River Wear over the last 10 years; and how many prosecutions were made as a result.

Mr. Baldry: I understand that information on details of reported pollution incidents, or on numbers of prosecutions, is not held centrally by the National Rivers Authority in respect of individual rivers.

Global Environmental Facility

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting in Geneva on 14 February to review progress made in implementing the global environmental facility; and what commitment has been made by the United Kingdom in terms of *(a)* financial resources and *(b)* expertise to the GEF.

Mr. Baldry: The focus of the global environment facility—GEF—participants meeting was to discuss the evolution of the GEF and its relationship with the proposed international conventions on climate change and on biodiversity. The meeting was constructive. The GEF chairman has been given a mandate to approach convention negotiations to explain what links could be developed between the GEF and the conventions and to report to the next GEF meeting in April.

The United Kingdom has committed £40·3 million to the current three-year pilot phase of the GEF for global environmental activities including related expertise.

House Purchase Discount Schemes

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to ensure that applicants for houses under transferable discount schemes are limited to purchasing private sector property within the areas in which such schemes are operational.

Mr. Yeo: No. Cash incentive schemes are aimed at releasing housing in areas of acute housing pressure. Requiring grant recipients to purchase homes within such areas would add to the housing problems of those areas.

City Challenge

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate the cost of hiring the Queen Elizabeth conference centre for the city challenge press conference held on 18 February.

Mr. Portillo: The cost of hiring the Mountbatten suite in the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre for the press launch of round two of city challenge on 18 February was £3,965·00, inclusive of VAT.

Federation of Associations of Manchester Estates

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations the Minister for Housing and Planning has received from the Federation of Associations of Manchester Estates; what reply is being sent; what action is being taken; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to the right hon. Member on 27 January about Manchester city council's housing investment programme allocation, which is also the subject of a letter dated 6 February received from the Federation of Associations of Manchester Estates. The Department's regional controller in the north-west replied to FAME on 25 February in similar terms.

North Yorkshire County Council

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the standard spending assessment in 1991-92 for North Yorkshire county council for social services; and what is the figure in 1992-93.

Mr. Key: The standard spending assessment for personal social services for North Yorkshire county council in 1991-92 is £49·89 million and for 1991-92 will be £52·837 million.

Marine Consultation Areas

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to issue a consultation paper on marine consultation areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I am today issuing a joint consultation paper with the Welsh Office on a new scheme to extend the designation of sites of marine conservation interest in England and Wales beyond the existing statutory marine nature reserves. This new designation is "marine consultation area" and I am publishing a first list of 16 proposed sites together with draft Government guidelines, addressed to regulatory agencies, on the procedures to be adopted in relation to them. Comments are being invited from these regulatory agencies and from others with interests in the localities concerned, the conservation of marine fauna and flora, and the operations likely to be affected. These are to be with the Departments concerned by Wednesday 22 April 1992.

The scheme acknowledges the important role that statutory marine nature reserves have played, and will continue to play, in promoting marine nature conservation, while recognising that there is a legitimate conservation interest that extends beyond statutory reserves. The sea itself cannot be fenced off and effective protection of areas marine conservation interest requires voluntary co-operation from a wide range of sea users.

The scheme proposed builds on one already in place in Scotland but goes further by way of a Government circular which gives clear guidelines to promote consultation between all the bodies concerned. A draft of this circular forms the basis of the consultation document.

All bodies taking decisions that might affect the conservation interest of the listed sites are asked to consult English Nature, or the Countryside Council for Wales as appropriate, at the earliest feasible stage. Any advice offered by the conservation agencies as a result of this consultation is to be given due weight by decision-makers and the conservation agencies are to be told of decisions taken in the light of their advice.

The scheme is intended to run on an entirely voluntary basis with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee monitoring results in order to determine its effectiveness. Annual reports, which will be made available to the public on request, will be submitted to the Government Departments concerned.

The 16 sites have been selected on the basis of advice from English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales and include existing and proposed statutory marine nature reserves. A full list indicating area and position is set out as an annex to the circular. Copies of the consultation paper have today been placed in the Library.

In addition, detailed descriptions of 16 sites, together with maps, are to be published separately in a free-standing document entitled "Marine Consultation Areas—A Description". Copies of the latest draft are available from my Department.

The issue of the consultation paper fulfils the commitment in the White Paper anniversary report "This Common Inheritance—The First Year Report", Cm 1655 —paragraph 5.28, that the Government would publish, on a consultative basis, by early 1992, a first list of proposed marine consultation areas in England and Wales, and draft Government guidelines addressed to regulatory agencies.

Housing Action Trusts

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the timetable and implementation date of the housing action trusts in Liverpool.

Sir George Young: Liverpool city council and tenants of its 71 high-rise blocks have recently pressed us to reach an early decision on whether to proceed to ballot tenants on the proposal for a housing action trust.

Following careful consideration of the feasibility study prepared by the council, my right hon. Friend has decided that a ballot should be undertaken as soon as practicable and convenient for tenants. I would be content for this to begin on 25 March.

Liverpool city council's 71 tower blocks currently suffer a range of severe physical, security and managerial problems. Nevertheless, with appropriate investment and management, I believe they can provide an important resource for meeting housing needs and for the foreseeable future. I am fully satisfied that the housing action trust proposal represents the best means of protecting this resource, and improving the housing, environmental and social conditions of tenants.

Emissions

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements are in hand to take into consideration the combined, cumulative effects of emissions from projects in the south-east Thames corridor including the Deptford incinerator, the Bexley incinerator and the Greenwich power station when approval for each specific project is being sought separately.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 24 February 1992]:* All current applications for power stations and incinerators in the east Thamesside London boroughs are supported by environmental assessment statements. We are satisfied that existing arrangements for considering such applications can provide for appropriate account to be taken of the environmental effects of other developments in the vicinity of the one that is under consideration.

Mobile Homes

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to complete the current review of legislation affecting mobile home owners.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 25 February 1992]:* I shall be announcing proposals in the very near future.

HEALTH

Charitable Appeals

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by region the location of computer-assisted tomography scanners and magnetic resonance machines that were funded by charitable appeals.

Mr. Dorrell: The source of funding is not always known centrally. The available information on cases when all or part of the purchase is said to have come from appeals or donations is as follows:

1. Magnetic resonance machines
REGION AND LOCATION
North-West Thames
Royal Postgraduate Medical School
National Heart and Chest Hospital
Mount Vernon Hospital
Royal Marsden Hospital
St. Mary's Hospital

North-East Thames
National Hospital for Nervous Diseases
The Hospitals for Sick Children
Royal Free Hospital
Middlesex Hospital

South Western
Frenchay Hospital

East Anglia
Addenbrooke's Hospital

Oxford
Stoke Mandeville Hospital
John Radcliffe Hospital
Royal Berkshire Hospital

South West Thames
Royal Surrey County Hospital

Trent
Royal Hallamshire Hospital

2. Computer-assisted Tomography Scanners
REGION AND LOCATION
Northern
Cumberland Infirmary
Newcastle General
Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle
South Cleveland Hospital, Middlesbrough
Bishop Auckland General Hospital
Sunderland District General Hospital

Yorkshire
Bradford Royal Infirmary
Royal Halifax Infirmary
Staincliffe Hospital, Dewsbury
Harrogate District Hospital
The Royal Infirmary, Huddersfield
York District Hospital

Trent
Kings Mill Hospital, Mansfield
Leicester Royal Infirmary
Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal Hospital
Lincoln County Hospital
Nottingham City
Royal Hallamshire Hospital
Pilgrim Hospital, Boston
Derby Royal Infirmary

East Anglia
James Paget Hospital, Great Yarmouth
Hinchingbrooke Hospital, Huntingdon
Peterborough Hospitals
Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Kings Lynn
West Suffolk Hospital, Bury St. Edmunds

North West Thames
Mount Vernon
St. Mary's Hospital, London
Westminster Hospital
Watford District General Hospital, Hertfordshire
The Royal Marsden Hospital, Riverside

North East Thames
Essex County Hospital
Princess Alexandra Hospital
The National Hospitals, Queens Square
Great Ormond Street Hospital, Bloomsbury

South East Thames
Royal Sussex, Brighton
Farnborough Hospital
Guy's Hospital
The Maudsley Hospital (Lewisham District)

South West Thames
Worthing Hospital
The Royal Marsden Hospital, Sutton

Wessex
Basingstoke District Hospital
Bournemouth General Hospital
Queen Alexandra Hospital, Cosham

Oxford
Kettering General Hospital
Northampton General Hospital
Royal Berkshire Hospital

South Western
Bristol Radiology and Oncology Centre
Cheltenham General Hospital
Royal Cornwall Hospital, Truro
Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital
Yeovil District Hospital
Southmead Hospital, Bristol

West Midlands
The Corbett Hospital, Stourbridge
Good Hope Hospital
North Staffordshire R. I., Stoke-On-Trent
Midland Centre for Neuro, Smethwick
Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, Shrewsbury
Children's Hospital
Burton District Hospital Centre
Worcester R. I., Ronkswood Branch

Mersey
Whiston Hospital
Clatterbridge Hospital

North Western
Blackburn R. I.
Victoria Hospital, Blackpool
Bury General Hospital
Royal Lancaster Infirmary
Booth Hall Child Hospital, Blackley
Christie Hospital
Tameside General Hospital

Health Service Pay

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the national health service, and at which grades, he expects to earn more than £20,280 per annum following the recent pay review body report.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 5 February at column *207*. Following the recent pay review body awards, it is now estimated that on 1 April 1992 at least 83,000 people working in the NHS in England, and in the same categories listed in the earlier reply, will have basic earnings greater than £20,280 per annum. An additional and substantial number in most of those categories will have gross earnings in excess of £20,280, because they receive additional payments such as overtime and allowances. The review body award for senior nurses and midwives, and pay settlements due on 1 April will further increase the numbers earning more than £20,280.

Prescriptions

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of prescription charges for each year since 1979 in cash terms, real terms and as an index with 1979 as the base.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The requested information is in the table. Only one in six prescription items dispensed in the NHS now attracts a charge, compared with one in three in 1979. Last year over 100 million more exempt items were dispensed than in 1979.

Prescription charge £	*Date of increase*	*Cost at 1979-80 prices* £	*Index (1979-80 prices)*
0·20	Current at 1 January 1979	0·20	100
0·45	16 July 1979	0·45	225
0·70	1 April 1980	0·59	295
1·00	1 December 1980	0·85	425
1·30	1 April 1982	0·94	470
1·40	1 April 1983	0·96	480
1·60	1 April 1984	1·05	525
2·00	1 April 1985	1·25	625
2·20	1 April 1986	1·32	660
2·40	1 April 1987	1·37	685
2·60	1 April 1988	1·38	690
2·80	1 April 1989	1·40	700
3·05	1 April 1990	1·40	700
3·40	1 April 1991	1·46	730

GP Lists

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the present procedures whereby medical doctors can remove patients from their panel list without being required to give any reason; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Since the foundation of the NHS, a GP has had a right (subject to certain safeguards as regards necessary treatment) to remove a patient from his or her list without giving a reason. With effect from April 1990 patients have had the same right to withdraw from a doctor's list without giving a reason. The Family Health Service Authority will help any patient who has problems in finding another doctor, and, if necessary, will allocate the patient to a doctor's list.

Insulin

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 27 November, *Official Report*, column *544*, to the hon. Member for Ashford, (Mr. Speed), when he hopes to provide needles for insulin-injecting pens on prescription for diabetics; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I cannot add to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford on 27 November 1991 at column *544*.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received *(a)* in favour of and *(b)* against issuing needles for insulin-injecting pens on prescription to diabetics during the current session; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have received a number of representations in favour of issuing needles for insulin-injecting pens on prescription during the current session. We aim to make both pens and needles available on prescription as soon as resources allow.

Legionnaire's Disease

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of cases of Legionnaire's disease at each provider unit and trust since April 1991.

Mr. Dorrell: In 1991 three cases of Legionnaire's disease were reported in residents of England and Wales in patients who were believed to have acquired their infection in hospital. The three cases were reported from the Freeman group of hospitals NHS trust site at Freeman Road hospital, Newcastle, and the illness in the cases began in June, July and October respectively. There were 10 other cases reported in England and Wales which may have been contracted in hospital, but there was insufficient evidence to determine whether the source was in hospital or in the community.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the communicable disease surveillance centre is preparing a report on the recent outbreak of Legionnaire's disease at the Freeman hospital trust, Newcastle.

Mr. Dorrell: The public health laboratory service (PHLS) communicable disease surveillance centre was not involved in the investigation of this incident and will therefore not be preparing a report.

Pharmacy

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has for the introduction of a statutory requirement for pharmacists to inform customers when a medication is cheaper by normal retail sale than by prescription; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Only a small number of items prescribed by GPs can be bought without a prescription. Where these are available at a price less than the prescription charge, the pharmacist is, of course, free to point this out. There are no plans to make this a statutory requirement.

General Practitioner Charges

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has for the introduction of charges for visits to and by general practitioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no such plans.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of prescriptions given to adults of less than pensionable age result in the payment of the prescription charge; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: An estimated 40 per cent. of prescription items dispensed to adults below the state retirement pension age attract a charge. Extensive exemption and charge remission arrangements, coupled with the prescription prepayment certificate scheme, protect those people who may otherwise have difficulty in paying prescription charges. In 1990-91 a charge was paid on only one item in six dispensed in the NHS and 100 million more items were dispensed free than in 1979, when one item in three attracted a charge.

Non-alcoholic Drinks

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had on the promotion of non-alcoholic drinks.

Mr. Dorrell: We have had a number of informal meetings with the Portman Group and with some of its sponsor companies about how the sensible use of alcohol might be encouraged, in the course of which the promotion of non-alcoholic drinks has been discussed. At recent conferences "Women and Alcohol" in December 1991 and the "Education on Alcohol" conference this month, not only were non-alcoholic drinks advertised but they were the only drinks available.

Residential Care

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he has received on the closure of residential care homes run by North Yorkshire county council in *(a)* Whitby and *(b)* Harrogate;

(2) what representations he has received concerning residential places for the elderly in the North Yorkshire county council area.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No such representations have been received. It is for each local authority to determine the best way in which to meet the need for social services in their area, including residential care.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many places in residential care establishments in North Yorkshire were available in each of the last five years *(a)* under the management of North Yorkshire county council, *(b)* in the voluntary sector, *(c)* under the management of housing associations and *(d)* with other owners.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information in respect of elderly people is given in the table.

Overall residential care provision for elderly people in North Yorkshire increased from 5,500 in 1987 to 5,884 in 1991.

Table 1

Number of residential care places primarily for the elderly, by sector, and housing association stock for the elderly in the North Yorkshire local authority 1987-91

Numbers

As at 31 March	*Local authority homes*	*Voluntary homes*	*Private homes*	*Housing Association*	
				Housing units[1]	*Hostel bedspaces*[2]
1987	2,004	603	2,893	1,330	280
1988	1,984	562	3,202	1,370	360
1989	1,952	626	3,314	1,580	320
1990	1,876	582	3,350	1,580	350
1991	1,823	648	3,413	2,120	380

[1] Housing units—Total number of units in schemes designed for the elderly. The units are self contained dwelling units and units in shared housing with no warden support. In the latter case, one unit is a group of rooms sharing facilities.
[2] Hostel bedspaces—Bedspaces in hostels catering exclusively for the elderly. A hostel is a building containing single or shared rooms which are not self contained and which has warden support. Nursing homes are excluded.

Community Care Reforms

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the Government are doing to help local authorities make the investment in information technology necessary to support its community care reforms.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are committed to turning our community care policy into practice. We are making £10·175 million available through supplementary credit approval for capital spending in 1992-93 on information technology to support the implementation of "Caring For People". This allocation is more than double that for

1991-92. Local authorities will be free to use their allocation on systems to support any of the various aspects of "Caring For People". These may include systems to support care management and assessment, systems to enable complaints and inspection procedures, project planning and management systems and software to link existing databases with new financial management systems.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total number of employees in his Department; and how many are *(a)* black, and *(b)* disabled.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The total number of staff in post in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office including the Overseas Development Administration at 1 April 1991 was 8,277. In voluntary surveys 181 had declared themselves to be of ethnic minority origin. At 1 June 1991 the FCO employed 49 registered disabled staff.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a table showing the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in his Department in each of grades (i) 1, (ii) 2, (iii) 3, (iv) 4, (v) 5, (vi) 6, (vii) 7, (viii) SEO, (ix) HEO, (x) administrative trainee, (xi) EO, (xii), CO and (xiii) CA.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The latest available figures for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the Overseas Development Administration, are as follows:

Grade (and Equivalents)	*Male*	*Female*
1	8	—
2	31	—
3	121	6
4	1	—
5	329	14
6	99	12
7	647	93
SEO	464	71·5
HEO	919	259
AT	218	20
EO	939·5	764·5
AO	1,210	1,463·5
AA	235	329·5

Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the new institutions of the CSCE; and if he will list their forthcoming meetings.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: At the meeting of the CSCE Council of Ministers in Prague on 30 and 31 January the CSCE's office for free elections was given broader functions and renamed as the office for democratic institutions and human rights.

The council also agreed on new functions for the conflict prevention centre; and that the committee of senior officials will henceforth meet more frequently and from time to time as an economic forum.

These changes which, together with a new programme of CSCE meetings, will be further discussed at the CSCE follow-up meeting in Helsinki from 24 March to 10 July 1992, are intended to continue the adaptation of the CSCE to enable it more effectively to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law, to engage in crisis management and conflict resolution and to encourage the transition to market economies.

Cambodia

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards Cambodia; and what measures he has taken and proposes to take to promote peace in that country.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We support the agreements on a comprehensive political settlement of the Cambodia conflict signed in Paris last October. The United Kingdom played an active part in the negotiations leading up to these agreements. We will continue to work both through the United Nations and bilaterally to ensure that the agreements are implemented fully.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Customs

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans there are to establish a dedicated computerised intelligence network across Europe for the Customs service.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: A new customs information system—CIS—is being developed for use across the European Community. It is planned to use the existing system customs enforcement network—SCENT—as a carrier for the CIS, which is being developed in phases.

The first phase will be in place later this year, and will provide encrypted computer messaging facilities at all main ports and airports in the European Community. A central database willl be added to this system in the second phase, providing specific intelligence about potential customs offences, and information on recent smuggling trends. In the light of experience from the first two phases, consideration will be given to enhancing the system to incorporate CIS facilities into national computer systems, with the possibility of eventually establishing a fully integrated system.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the start-up costs of the secure customs enforcement network; and what are its annual running costs since it became operational.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Over the first three years of the system, commencing in 1986, EC Commission spending to launch the system totalled approximately 300,000 ecu. More recent figures from the Commission are not readily obtainable except at disproportionate cost.

The United Kingdom's Intervention Board executive agency recently installed a terminal at a total cost of £900·71, including first quarter running costs of £55·83.

Running costs for the Customs and Excise terminal have totalled £4,987·67 from the time of installation in late 1987 to 8 December 1991.

More recent or detailed figures are not available except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the purpose of the secure customs enforcement network; when it was established; and which authorities have access to the system.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: SCENT was developed in response to increasing needs for exchange of information between customs operational investigation services in the European Community. It has an electronic encrypted mailing system, the facility to send messages to telex machines and it provides access to databases of reference information such as Lloyds Seadata. Initiated by the Commission towards the end of 1986, SCENT became operational from 1987 onwards.

Access to the system is strictly controlled, and limited to authorised users. Most terminals are used by customs services. Others are allocated to the Commission's directorate general XXI for work on customs questions or movements of drugs precursor chemicals and directorate general VI for common agricultural policy work. The United Kingdom Intervention Board executive agency and its equivalent bodies in other member states have access to the system. The other two users are the International Narcotics Control Board and the United Nations, which has one terminal.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many terminals are connected to the secure Customs enforcement network; and what plans there are to expand access to the system.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: There are currently 29 terminals in use, two of which are in the United Kingdom. It is planned to increase the total number of terminals to about 200, most of which should be installed by the end of 1992. Of these, 25 should be sited in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many passengers who are United Kingdom citizens returning from Brussels on the 18 February at Heathrow on flight BA 0397 were questioned by Customs and Excise; and what was the result of the questioning.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 24 February 1992]:* I regret that the information requested is not available. Customs at Heathrow deal with large numbers of passengers and passengers from different sources pass through customs controls simultaneously. No record is kept of individual passenger challenges except where seizures or search of person result.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the rates of VAT charged in each other EC country for *(a)* food in shops, *(b)* food in restaurants, *(c)* books, *(d)* magazines, *(e)* newspapers, *(f)* household fuel, *(g)* rents, *(h)* house purchase, *(i)* children's clothing *(j)* community centres and *(k)* transport fares.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Rates of VAT charged in each other EC country for food in shops, food in restaurants, books, magazines, newspapers, household fuel, rents, house purchase, children's clothing, community centres and transport fares according to the latest information available, are set out in the tables.

(a) VAT on food in shops in the EC[1]

Country	*Rate percentage*
Belgium	6·0
Denmark	25·0
France	5·5[2]
Germany	7·0
Greece	8·0
Ireland	0·0[3]
Italy	4·0[4], 9, 12
Luxembourg	3·0[5], 6
Netherlands	6·0
Portugal	0·0[6], 8, (6)
Spain	6·0

[1] Excluding luxury foods.
[2] With certain exceptions, eg sweets, ice-cream, margarine which are standard-rated at 18·6 per cent.
[3] Alcohol and soft drinks other than fruit juices are liable at 21 per cent. in all circumstances, as is all food and drink supplies through a vending machine.
[4] The lower rate applies to essential foodstuffs such as bread and pasta. 12 per cent. applies to lobsters and oysters, lobster and oyster preserve, puffed cereal, extracts and meat juices, sauces, condiments, soups and broths.
[5] The lower rate applies to meat, meat products, bread and butter.
[6] The rate shown in brackets applies to the autonomous regions of the Madeira and Azores archipelagoes. The zero rate applies to unprepared foodstuffs.

(b) VAT on food in restaurants in the EC

Country	*Rate per cent.*
Belgium	17·0
Denmark	25·0
France	18·6
Germany	14·0
Greece	18·0
Ireland	12·5
Italy	[1]9·0
Luxembourg	6·0
Netherlands	18·5
Portugal	[2]8·0, (6)
Spain	[3]6·0, 13

Notes:
[1] Excluding the supply of food in luxury premises including luxury hotels.
[2] Lower rates apply in the autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira archipelagoes.
[3] The higher rate applies to services supplied in luxury hotels.

(c) VAT on books in the EC

Country	*Rate per cent.*
Belgium	6·0
Denmark	25·0
France	5·5
Germany	7·0
Greece	4·0
Ireland	0·0
Italy	4·0
Luxembourg	6·0
Netherlands	6·0
Portugal	0·0
Spain	6·0

(d) VAT on magazines in the EC

Country	*Rate per cent*
Belgium	6·0
Denmark	25·0
France	2·1
Germany	7·0
Greece	4·0
Ireland	10·0
Italy	4·0

Country	Rate per cent
Luxembourg	6·0
Netherlands	6·0
Portugal	0·0
Spain	6·0

(e) VAT on newspapers in the EC

Country	Rate per cent.
Belgium	6·0
Denmark	0·0
France	2·1
Germany	7·0
Greece	4·0
Ireland	10·0
Italy	4·0
Luxembourg	6·0
Netherlands	6·0
Portugal	0·0
Spain	6·0

(f) VAT on household fuel in the European Community
Rates per cent.

Country	Oil	Gas	Electricity	Coal	Peat	Wood
Belgium	17·0	17·0	17·0	6·0	6·0	6·0
Denmark	25·0	25·0	25·0	25·0	25·0	25·0
France	18·6	5·5	5·5	18·6	18·6	18·6
Germany	14·0	14·0	14·0	14·0	14·0	7·0
Greece	[1]	[1]	[1]	8·0	8·0	8·0
Ireland	12·5	12·5	12·5	12·5	12·5	12·5
Italy	9·0	9·0	9·0	9·0	9·0	9·0
Luxembourg	6·0	6·0	6·0	6·0	6·0	6·0
Netherlands	18·5	18·5	18·5	18·5	18·5	18·5
Portugal[2]	(6·0) 8·0	(6·0) 8·0	(6·0) 8·0	(6·0) 8·0	(6·0) 8·0	(6·0) 8·0
Spain	13·0	13·0	13·0	13·0	13·0	13·0

[1] Greece has set its VAT at 4, 8, 18 and 36 per cent., but full details about the applicability of the rates are not yet available.
[2] The lower rate applies to the autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira Archipelagoes.

(g) VAT on rents in the EC

The letting of immovable property is exempt from VAT in every member state, although some member states operate an option to tax in certain circumstances.

(h) VAT on house purchase in the EC

Country	Rates on new buildings (per cent.)	Rate on second hand buildings (per cent.)
Belgium	17·0	Exempt
Denmark	25·0	Exempt
France	18·6	Exempt
Germany	Exempt	Exempt
Greece	[1]Taxable	Exempt
Ireland	10·0	[2]Exempt
Italy	[3]4·0, 19	4, 19
Luxembourg	Exempt	Exempt
Netherlands	18·5	Exempt
Portugal	Exempt	Exempt
Spain	[4]13·0	Exempt

[1] Greece has set its VAT rates at 4, 8, 18 and 36 per cent., but full details about the applicability of the rates are not yet available.
[2] Or 10 per cent. if developed since 31 October 1972 and input tax credit was claimed.
[3] Certain "low-priced" housing 4 per cent.; others 19 per cent.
[4] Or 6 per cent. if the first supply by a constructor of a residential dwelling.

(i) VAT on children's clothing in the EC

Country	Rate per cent.
Belgium	19·0
Denmark	25·0
France	18·6
Germany	14·0
Greece	18·0
Ireland	[2]12·5
Italy	19·0
Luxembourg	15·0
Netherlands	18·5
Portugal	[1]17·0 (12)
Spain	13·0

Notes:

[1] The lower rate applies in the autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira archipelagoes.
[2] To be increased to 16 per cent. on 1 March 1992.

(j) VAT on community centres in the EC

Leasing of such buildings is exempt in all member states. For purchase (including construction), in other member states, the rates in the table "VAT on house purchase in the EC" apply.

(k) VAT on public transport (including bus fares) in the EC

Country	Rate (per cent.)
Belgium	6·0
Denmark	Exempt
France	5·5
Germany	[1]7·0
Greece	8·0
Ireland	Exempt
Italy	[1]Exempt
Luxembourg	6·0
Netherlands	6·0
Portugal	8·0
Spain	6·0

[1] For journeys within towns or of less than 50 kilometres; otherwise Germany 14 per cent., Italy 9 per cent.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what, in the latest year for which information is available, is the proportion of consumer spending subject to the standard rate of VAT, exempt from VAT and subject to a zero rate of VAT.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In 1990, the latest year for which estimates are available, some 57 per cent. of consumers' expenditure was standard rated, a further 22 per cent. was exempt and 12 per cent. was zero rated.

Income Statistics

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest estimates of *(a)* original, *(b)* gross, *(c)* disposable and *(d)* post-tax income, by decile, in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maude: The information, derived from the 1989 family expenditure survey, is given in the table:

Decile group[2]	*Average annual household income*[1]			
	Original income	*Gross income*	*Disposable income*	*Post-tax income*
Bottom	1,000	4,100	3,400	2,200
2nd	1,600	5,200	4,500	3,400
3rd	2,800	6,200	5,300	4,100
4th	6,700	9,400	7,800	5,900
5th	10,100	12,100	9,800	7,500
6th	13,000	14,600	11,700	9,100
7th	16,200	17,500	13,800	11,000
8th	19,600	20,500	16,100	12,900
9th	23,700	24,400	19,100	15,400
Top	36,400	37,000	28,900	24,800
All households	13,100	15,100	12,000	9,600

[1] Rounded to the nearest £100.
[2] The 7,410 households were ranked by equivalised disposable income.
Source: Economic Trends January 1992.

Motor Taxation

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total revenue from motor taxation in 1991-92; and what is his estimated revenue for 1992-93 divided into its constituent parts, for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maude: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) on 4 February 1992, at column *100*. Revised estimates for 1991-92, and figures for 1992-93 will be given in the Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Alcoholic Beverages

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to receive the European Commission study on the possible distortion of competition between different alcoholic beverages as a result of the proposed European excise structure.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 21 February 1992]:* I have not been advised of a date for publication of the Commission study.

Income Tax

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the objective of the married couples allowance; and what assessment he has made of the effect of the married couples allowance for couples where both partners have the same level of gross income.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 25 February 1992]:* The married couple's allowance is intended to recognise the special responsibilities associated with marriage, which can encompass a variety of dependent relationships. The effect of the allowance is the same whatever the relative level of income of the partners, provided they earn enough to make use of their allowances.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will review the application form for disability living allowance with a view to making it shorter and less complicated.

Mr. Hanley: The form has been carefully designed to be both clear to the applicant and to allow applicants to explain fully the limitations on their abilities. It will, however, be kept under review to enable improvements to be identified and made as and when necessary.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what consultation took place with general medical practitioners or welfare advice groups during the preparation of the application forms for the disability living allowance;

(2) what evaluations or tests of the application forms for disability living allowance were made prior to their publication.

Mr. Hanley: Extensive consultation was carried out in Great Britain and Northern Ireland before the final version of the disability living allowance application form was determined. This included consultation with the British Medical Association and various disability and welfare groups and the testing of draft forms with disabled people. The resulting form has been specifically designed for completion by disabled people, with clear layout and large print.

Fair Employment

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken by the Social Security Agency to appoint equality officers to ensure that fair employment legislation and sex discrimination legislation is being adhered to in relation to all staff appointments.

Mr. Hanley: The Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland are responsible for the selection of all permanent non-industrial staff appointed to the Northern Ireland civil service, including the Social Security Agency. The selection procedures adopted take account of equal opportunity legislation. The Department of Health and Social Services, within which the agency operates, has in place a departmental equal opportunities officer to ensure that the equal opportunities policies of the NICS are put into effect.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken by the area health and social services boards to appoint equality officers to ensure that fair employment and sex discrimination legislation is being adhered to in relation to all staff appointments.

Mr. Hanley: An equal opportunities unit has been established in each health and social services board since 1988. The primary responsibility of these units is to ensure that equality of opportunity policy of their board is applied to all staff regardless of religious affiliation, gender or disability. These units are also responsible for ensuring that the provisions of the fair employment legislation are applied to all staff.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to ensure that persons involved in interview panels in the area health and social services boards are adequately briefed about employment legislation to ensure equality under the Fair Employment (NI) Act 1989 and the Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1988.

Mr. Hanley: Each of the health and social services boards organises courses and seminars for staff involved in selection and appointments to ensure its policy of equality of opportunity is applied regardless of religious affiliation, gender or disability and to explain how the provisions of the fair employment legislation apply to staff in post and to applicants and appointees.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to publish the religious breakdown of companies, organisations and businesses in accordance with requirements of the fair employment legislation.

Mr. Needham: The Fair Employment Commission has made public its intention to publish information on the composition of individual private sector concerns with more than 25 employees and specified public authorities. The date and manner of publication have not yet been decided.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Fair Employment Commission will publish its report into employment practices in the colleges of further education located within the Belfast education and library board.

Mr. Needham: The Fair Employment Commission has forwarded a draft report of its investigation into teaching staff in further education colleges in Belfast to the Belfast education and library board. The board's formal response is awaited by the commission.

The commission plans to publish the report when this response has been received and considered.

Industrial Development Board

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the names of the companies assisted by the Industrial Development Board which located factories in each of the district council areas in Northern Ireland from 1 April 1991 to 31 December 1991.

Mr. Needham: Four new inward investment projects were secured in this period. Three of them, Vision Information Consulting Ltd., Audio Processing Technology Ltd. and the Royal Mail returned letters centre, will be located in Belfast city council area. The fourth, involving HM Customs and Excise, will be located in Derry city and Fermanagh district council areas. The Royal Mail and HM Customs and Excise projects were secured without selective financial assistance.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many jobs were created by the Industrial Development Board in each district council area in Northern Ireland from 1 April 1991 to 31 December 1991.

Mr. Needham: Information in terms of jobs created is not readily available and could be compiled only at disproportionate cost. The number of new jobs promoted in the period, by district council area, is shown in the table.

Jobs promoted by IDB in Northern Ireland in each local government area from 1 April to 31 December 1991

	Number of jobs
Antrim	—
Ards	103
Armagh	—
Ballymena	50
Ballymoney	57
Banbridge	29
Belfast	412
Carrickfergus	—
Castlereagh	84
Coleraine	50
Cookstown	—
Craigavon	616
Derry	48
Down	—
Dungannon	11
Fermanagh	12
Larne	25
Limavady	—
Lisburn	125
Magherafelt	—
Moyle	—
Newry & Mourne	—
Newtownabbey	—
North Down	54
Omagh	—
Strabane	—
Total	1,676

DOE Liaison Office, Killyleagh

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will issue a statement in relation to the siting of a Department of the Environment liaison office at Killyleagh, County Down.

Mr. Needham: Following a detailed process of consultation the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland recently issued a statement on the management structure for Strangford Lough. This statement made it clear that the location of the liaison office would be a matter for the Strangford Lough management committee which is now being set up.

Income Support

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many claimants in receipt of income support were having deductions made for *(a)* social fund loans, *(b)* fuel costs, *(c)* in respect of assumed rent and rate contributions from other members of the household and *(d)* other deductions on 1 January at each social security agency in Northern Ireland; and what were the figures on 1 January 1991 and 1 January 1989.

Mr. Hanley: Social Security operational matters are the responsibility of Mr. Alec Wylie, chief executive of the Social Security Agency. He will write to the hon. Gentleman and copies of his reply will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Strangford Lough

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will issue the draft order in respect of the management of Strangford Lough.

Mr. Needham: The proposals relating to the establishment of a management structure for Strangford

Lough included in the Departments' recently produced statement do not require the making of an order to bring them into effect.

Social Security (Deductions)

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many claimants were having *(a)* one deduction made, *(b)* two deductions made and *(c)* three deductions or more made on 1 January at each social security office in Northern Ireland; and what were the figures on 1 January 1991 and 1 January 1989.

Mr. Hanley: Social Security operational matters are the responsibility of Mr. Alec Wylie, chief executive of the Social Security Agency. However, I understand that the information is not held centrally and therefore cannot be supplied on grounds of disproportionate cost.

Under-fives

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce an under-fives initiative in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The report of an interdepartmental review of policy and services for the under-fives is expected later this year. As part of its work, the group conducting the review has commissioned research aimed at quantifying the demand for provision for the under-fives and at improving the information available on the needs and preferences of parents and children. Work is also well advanced on the preparation of a draft children (NI) order. This, among other things, will provide a clearer legislative framework for the development of services for the under-fives and will strengthen procedures for the regulation of day care services, bringing them broadly into line with those introduced in the Children Act 1989.

Messrs Hartstones Ltd

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what funds have been made available by the Industrial Development Board in each of the past three years to Messrs Hartstones Ltd. for its Berkshire plant in Newtownards; if the grant-aided plant and machinery is still on site; and if he will make a statement on the redundancies recently announced at this factory.

Mr. Needham: In August 1989 the IDB made an offer of assistance of £1,045,200 to Berkshire Hosiery (UK) Ltd., a subsidiary of the Hartstone Group plc. The assistance was provided to support a major re-equipment project aimed at securing existing employment and the future development of the company.

Since that time some £809,078 of grant has been paid to Berkshire Hosiery (UK) Ltd.—£205,039 in 1989-90, £550,379 in 1990-91 and £53,660 in 1991-92. No grant was paid directly to the Hartstone Group plc.

At present all of the grant-aided plant and machinery remains on site.

I regret the loss of jobs in the hosiery operation which have arisen from overcapacity in the group. The company has indicated to the Industrial Development Board that its activities at Newtownards will be concentrated on its successful sock business.

HSS Trusts

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many expressions of interest in becoming HSS trusts he has received; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Eleven expressions of interest have been received and I have decided to invite all the sponsors to make formal applications to become HSS trusts in April 1993. The services involved are:

Belfast City Hospital
Craigavon Area Hospitals Group
Down and Lisburn Unit of Management
Eastern Board Ambulance Service
Green Park Unit of Management
Mater Infirmorum Hospital
Newry and Mourne Unit of Management
North Down and Ards Community Unit
North and West Belfast Community
South and East Belfast Community Unit
Ulster, North Down and Ards Hospitals Unit

Training Schemes

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the most recent information he has on the destination of people who leave the job training programme; how many leavers got jobs, became unemployed or went on to further training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The most recent information available on the destination of participants leaving the job training programme is for the period 1 April 1991 to 31 December 1991 and is as follows:

JTP leavers whose destination is known	*Number of people*	*Percentage of total*
Found work	1,279	42
Unemployed	1,380	45
Further training	334	19
Further education	67	2

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agricultural Land

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what factors he takes into account before consenting to the short-term letting of agricultural land under section 5 of the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986; and how many consents he has granted in each year since 1986.

Mr. Curry: Consent to short-term lettings under section 5 of the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986 is granted where it would be unreasonable to expect a landlord to let land on a full agricultural tenancy. The main circumstances which would satisfy this requirement were agreed with the industry and are as follows. Within this broad framework each case is considered according to individual circumstances. The categories outlined are not definitive and applications for consent on other grounds may be considered.

(a) Land for Development

When land is likely to go out of use within five to seven years, the compensation payable by the landlord on the termination of a full agricultural tenancy could exceed the amount of rent paid. In these circumstances approval of a short-term letting would normally be justified.

(b) *Reorganisation and transitional arrangements*
Approval may be given for a short-term letting for up to five years:

(i) if a landowner is planning the amalgamation or regrouping of the holding; or
(ii) if a prospective purchaser is to work the land before completion of sale; or
(iii) if a landlord wishes to make temporary arrangements pending a decision on the future use of the land, for example, if a tenant has died and the landlord wishes to make temporary arrangements before re-letting or selling; or
(iv) where a landlord wishes to give a person who is not an established or experienced tenant a period of trial before concluding a full tenancy; or
(v) where there is a definite intention that a landlord's son or daughter will take over a vacant holding within five years.

A further application involving the same parties on the same land can only be approved if there has been a material alteration in the circumstances.

(c) *Specialist cropping*
Approval may be given to a short-term letting to a specialist grower for a single crop requiring "clean land" for example, potatoes, carrots, brassicas, beans, bulbs. Consent may also be given for the growing of a crop, not normally grown on the holding, to be grown as a cleaner crop. A consent will normally be for one year only unless the specialist crop requires a longer period.

(d) *Allotments*
If allotment land is temporarily surplus to requirements approval will normally be given to a short-term letting.

(e) *Operational requirements on Government and other land*
Approval may also be given to a short-term letting where some agricultural use of the land is possible and desirable but a full agricultural tenancy is ruled out by operational or training requirements which affect the use of the land. This applies particularly, but not exclusively, to land owned by the Ministry of Defence.

The number of consents granted in England under section 5 since 1986 is as follows:

Year ending 28 February	*Number*
1986	205
1987	221
1988	287
1989	300
1990	397
1991	468

EC Surplus Food Scheme

Mr. Alison: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements he is making for the implementation of the EC surplus food scheme in the United Kingdom in 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: In its report on the operation of the first two years of this scheme the European Commission accepted that, judged as a food surplus disposal exercise, the scheme is inevitably expensive when compared with other mean of surplus disposal. However, it concluded that the facility to operate the scheme should continue to be available to member states.

The Government endorse the view that the scheme is not a satisfactory method of dealing with surpluses and of assisting those whom it should help. Nevertheless, the Government believe that eligible United Kingdom citizens should continue to have the opportunity of benefiting from the scheme in 1992-93.

For 1992, the Commission has, as in 1991, allocated some 150 mecu to the scheme for the European Community as a whole. The United Kingdom has maintained its share, some 25 mecu, which represents about £17·9 million worth of butter and beef.

The scheme already makes produce available in the United Kingdom to certain clearly defined categories of people. These are:

—those in receipt of income support or family credit
—the homeless and destitute
—those living in welfare hostels

We have decided to add to those recipients of the disability working allowance within the categories of those eligible.

Pensioners or the unemployed are eligible if they fall into one or other of these categories.

Agriculture departments will be inviting charitable and other non-profit making organisations wishing to take part in the distribution to apply for designation. Organisations will have the usual six weeks to submit their application. To improve the cost-effectiveness of the scheme, the designation of organisations will be for a period of two years. Preference will continue to be given to organisations providing meals for the homeless and those capable of distributing produce widely throughout their local Community.

We are arranging for further details to be publicised widely and to be sent to the appropriate bodies. Copies of this information have been placed in the Libraries.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Newspaper Merger

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received concerning the merger of North London News and Capital Newspapers; when he expects the report for the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: I have received an application for my consent to the transfer to EMAP plc of a controlling interest in Capital Newspapers Ltd. In this case I have discretion either to refer the matter to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission or to give consent without such a reference. Representations from third parties have been invited but none has yet been received.

Home Equity Loan Plans

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what initiatives he plans to assist those people threatened with the loss of their homes as a result of home equity loan plans that are no longer viable.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 21 February 1992]:* The Securities and Investments Board has put arrangements in place to ensure that information about problem cases is brought quickly to the attention of all bodies who may be able to help.

People in difficulties should contact the appropriate Financial Services Act regulator and also the mortgage

lender to discuss repayment and interest terms, and the investors compensation scheme if the investment firm has been declared in default and claims are being considered.

Development Assistance

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list *(a)* the grants and *(b)* other advantageous terms available to firms sited within areas with development status and those with assisted area status.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 25 February 1992]:* There are two main grant schemes available to businesses in the assisted areas of Great Britain. Regional selective assistance is available throughout the assisted areas and regional enterprise grants are available in development areas and the intermediate areas of Derbyshire, South Yorkshire, Plymouth and Fife which are covered by the European Community RESIDER and RENAVAL programmes. Also, consultancy support under the enterprise initiative is given at a higher rate in the assisted areas; and grants or loans may be made by the relevant Secretary of State towards the improvement of basic services.

In addition, English Estates, and other agencies in Scotland and Wales, have programmes for the provision of industrial and commercial premises in the assisted areas.

Low-energy Lighting

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make it his policy progressively to introduce low-energy lighting in all the buildings operated by his Department.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 25 February 1992]:* It is my Department's policy to install low-energy lighting wherever it is practicable and the costs are justified.

Ceramic Industry

Mrs. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give full details of the support offered to the ceramic and allied industry by the fairs and promotion branch for each of the last 13 years.

Mr. Sainsbury: Details of support for events organised by the British Ceramic Manufacturers Federation are not readily available prior to 1983-84. A table showing support follows. In 1990-91 the federation was offered support for one event in Frankfurt, but declined the offer. No application for support was made for 1991-92.

Financial year	*Number of exhibitors*	*Financial support* £
1983-84	47	41,617
1984-85	48	52,001
1985-86	22	28,165
1986-87	19	9,286
1987-88	19	19,500
1988-89	21	16,358
1989-90	24	26,267
1990-91	0	0
1991-92	0	0

In addition to receiving assistance at events organised by the federation, companies in the industry receive assistance at other DTI-supported events. However, records are not kept in a format to readily identify the number of such companies and the amount of support.

EMPLOYMENT

Job Vacancies

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the registered job vacancies at employment centres in the Tooting constituency on 18 February.

Mr. Jackson: On 3 January 1992, the latest date for which figures are available, the number of unfilled vacancies at the jobcentres covering the Tooting parliamentary constituency was 58.

Family Statistics

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish figures showing the number of *(a)* dependent children, *(b)* children under age five years, *(c)* working mothers, *(d)* two-earner couples, *(e)* working mothers with at least one child under age five years and, *(f)* two-earner couples with at least one child under age five years.

Mr. Jackson: Estimates from the labour force survey carried out in the spring of 1990 indicate that in Great Britain there were;

(a) 11,148,000 dependent children (under age 16 years),
(b) 3,698,000 children under age five years,
(c) 3,685,000 working mothers (aged 16-59),
(d) 6,957000 two-earner couples (women in employment aged 16-59 with a husband or cohabiting partner in employment),
(e) 1,250,000 working mothers (aged 16-59) with at least one child under age five years.

Overseas Visitors (Expenditure)

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish *(a)* the total number of and *(b)* estimated expenditure by overseas visitors to (i) London, (ii) England and (iii) the United Kingdom in each year since 1980.

Mr. Forth: The required figures are as follows:

Visits by overseas residents

Year	*Number of visits ('000)*			*Expenditure (£ million)*[1]		
	London	*England*	*United Kingdom*	*London*	*England*	*United Kingdom*
1980	7,440	11,150	12,421	1,695	2,665	2,930
1981	6,840	10,410	11,452	1,702	2,696	2,939
1982	7,140	10,680	11,636	1,825	2,850	3,133
1983	7,560	11,380	12,464	2,252	3,607	3,970
1984	8,400	12,550	13,644	2,658	4,166	4,576
1985	9,080	13,320	14,449	3,228	4,937	5,398

Year	Number of visits ('000) London	England	United Kingdom	Expenditure (£ million)[1] London	England	United Kingdom
1986	8,190	12,600	13,897	3,203	4,978	5,506
1987	9,330	14,250	15,566	3,574	5,668	6,212
1988	9,080	14,200	15,799	3,461	5,585	6,137
1989	9,870	15,480	17,338	4,015	6,308	6,889
1990	10,310	16,240	18,021	4,269	6,963	7,712

[1] Expenditure figures exclude visitors to the Channel Islands and certain visitors in transit.

Sign Language

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what sign language facilities are available to allow deaf persons to take up employment in the Employment Service;

(2) how many staff employed in jobcentres have sign language skills.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what support is available to deaf people on Government training schemes by way of sign language practitioners.

Mr. Jackson: Training and enterprise councils' resources include funding to support communication services for eligible deaf people on government funded training programmes. These services are also provided at two specialist residential training colleges for the deaf, which are also funded by the Employment Department.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide the latest figures for people who are long-term unemployed in *(a)* Leyton constituency, *(b)* Waltham Forest, *(c)* London and *(d)* nationally.

Mr. Jackson: The latest available information, relating to January 1992, is contained in the following table and can also be obtained from the NOMIS database system in the Library.

Long-term unemployment in January 1992[1]

Area	Number of long-term unemployed
Leyton parliamentary constituency	1,709
Waltham Forest local authority district	3,796
Greater London	108,361
United Kingdom	746,977

[1] Unemployment figures by duration are produced quarterly and are on the unadjusted basis. The definition of long-term unemployed is those people unemployed for one year or more.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Welsh Police Forces

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on manning levels of rural police forces in Wales.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The latest figures for police establishments and strength for the four Welsh police forces are as follows:

	Current establishment	Establishment 1 April 1992	Current strength (as at 30 November 1991)
Dyfed-Powys	944	969	948
Gwent	1,009	1,010	1,001
North Wales	1,352	1,369	1,342
South Wales	3,168	3,168	3,145

Television Reception

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy for reception of both Channel 4 television and S4C to be available throughout Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is not possible at present to broadcast both Channel 4 television and Sianel Pedwar Cymru throughout Wales, because there are insufficient available frequencies.

Traffic Offences (Camera Detection)

Sir Philip Goodhart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to bring forward regulations for type approved camera equipment to help with deterring and detecting speeding and traffic light offenders.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No camera equipment has yet completed the necessary laboratory tests. I cannot anticipate the outcome of these tests.

Sir Philip Goodhart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money he is making available to the police in the coming financial year for *(a)*

the purchase of red light and speed camera equipment and *(b)* the purchase of computer equipment and software to make use of such camera equipment.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We do not make allocations of grant for specific items of equipment. In 1992-93 the available provision of capital grant and credit approvals will support expenditure by provincial forces of £111·3 million on vehicles, equipment and minor building works. It is for police authorities to determine how this money should be used.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will extend the existing section 11 grants for 1991-92 for education purposes at the same rate to the end of the academic year 1991-92;

(2) what was the total sum *(a)* bid for and *(b)* allowed for grants to Bradford council for 1992-93 under section 11;

(3) what representations he has received from Bradford council on the future of section 11 grants;

(4) what total sums at 1991 prices were paid to Bradford council in each of the last five years under the provisions of section 11 on *(a)* education items and *(b)* all other services.

Mrs. Rumbold: Under new arrangements which were announced in October 1990 and which are designed to ensure that payments of grant under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 are targeted so as to achieve maximum benefit for members of ethnic minorities, local authorities were required to bid afresh by 30 April 1991 for all future funding from 1 April 1992. Local authorities were notified in December of the outcome of applications and it is not possible to extend previous funding in the way in which the hon. Member suggests.

Bradford council submitted applications for projects commencing on 1 April amounting in a full year to grant of £7·3 million at 1990-91 prices. Approximately £6 million, at 1992-93 prices, is expected to be paid in grant in 1992-93.

As the hon. Member is aware, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Education and Science and I will shortly be meeting representatives of the local authority, together with the hon. Member and his hon. Friends the Members for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden).

In the last five years for which figures are available, the amount of grant paid to Bradford council, expressed at 1990-91 prices, was approximately as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1986-87	6·1
1987-88	5·9
1988-89	6·2
1989-90	6·9
1990-91	6·5

It is not possible to give a precise breakdown between grant to support education and other services. In general, it is estimated that education provision accounted for approximately 80 per cent. of the total grant.

Magistrates Courts

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the White Paper on the future organisation of the magistrates courts as announced in his answer to the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) on 19 December, *Official Report*, columns *250-51*.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor, who is to take responsibility for the magistrates courts service from 1 April, and I have today published the White Paper "A New Framework for Local Justice", and copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Police Manpower

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state his reasons for rejecting the application of the South Wales police authority for an increase of 44 posts.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend takes decisions on applications for increases in police establishments from police authorities in the light of the professional advice of Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary. This advice takes account of, among other things, the relative needs of different forces as indicated by the manpower formula, the efficiency with which existing manpower is used, and the extent of any vacancies. The formula indicates that south Wales is relatively well provided at present, compared with other forces.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the number of additional uniformed officers excluding special constables that have been authorised to be added to the strength of the West Yorkshire police each year from 1975 to 1991 shown *(a)* in total and *(b)* by police station.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Increases in the police establishment for West Yorkshire police for the years in question are as follows. Allocations to individual police stations is a matter for the chief constable, and this information is not held centrally.

Year	*Number of police posts approved*
1975	1
1981	50
1987	50
1988	23
1989	32
1990	20
1991	16

Hampshire Constabulary

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was *(a)* the establishment of the Hampshire constabulary both police and civilians and *(b)* the number of police per head of population in Hampshire in the financial year 1990-91; and what is the (i) estimated establishment of the Hampshire constabulary, both police and civilians and (ii) the estimated number of police per head of population in Hampshire in the financial year 1991-92.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The available information, relating to the police establishment authorised by the Home Secretary and the civilian strength, is as follows:

	1990-91	1991-92
Police establishment	3,175	3,202
Civilian strength	[1]994	[2]1,039
Population per officer	528	[3]524

[1] As at 31 March 1991.
[2] As at 31 December 1991.
[3] On the basis of latest population figures at mid-1990, provided by the OPCS.

Convicted Criminals (Confessions)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answers of 5 February 1992, *Official Report*, column *163*, and 14 February 1992, *Official Report*, column *664-65*, if he will call for a report from the chief constables of Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and the West Midlands as to how many detectives were employed during 1990-91 obtaining voluntary admissions from convicted criminals.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is not available.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of employees in his Department; and how many are *(a)* black and *(b)* disabled.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The figures to which the hon. Member refers can be found in various reports published by the Treasury and the Office of the Minister for the Civil Service. These record that on 1 April 1991 the Home Office employed 41,994 non-industrial staff. Of those who responded to ethnic origin surveys carried out by the Department, 1,085 classified themselves as being of ethnic minority origin, representing 5·3 per cent. of the total number who responded. The Home Office employs 183 registered disabled persons, representing 0·4 per cent. of the total number of non-industrial staff.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a table showing the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in his Department in each of grades (i) 1, (ii) 2, (iii) 3, (iv) 4, (v) 5, (vi) 6, (vii) 7, (viii) SEO, (ix) HEO, (x) Administrative Trainee, (xi) EO, (xii) CO and (xiii) CA.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The April 1991 figures for men and women in grades 1 to 4 and SEO to AA were included in Her Majesty's Treasury's "Civil Service Statistics". This did not include an analysis of grades 5 to 7 and AT/HEODs. The nearest equivalent figures for these grades are at December 1990, as follows:

	Men	Women	Total
Grade 5	70	16	86
Grade 6	80	5	85
Grade 7	394	91	485
AT/HEOD	6	12	18

Northallerton Prison

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the refurbishment and improvement works in the vulnerable prisoner unit, Her Majesty's prison, Northallerton to be completed.

Mrs. Rumbold: Most of the work is expected to be completed by August 1992, and the remainder by March 1993.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will tabulate the salary increases of teachers from 1979; and if he will relate these to the annual rate of inflation for the same period.

Mr. Fallon: Increases in teachers' average salaries since 1979 are as follows. These take account of incremental drift and the full-year effect of increases in the number and value of incentive allowances. The Government propose to implement the recommendations of the school teachers review body for teachers' pay in 1992-93. This would increase the pay bill by 7·8 per cent. in that year.

	Teachers' average salaries[1] (cash) £	Percentage increase since 1979 (real terms)[2]
[3]April 1979	5,380	—
1980	7,380	12·7
1981	8,030	9·4
1982	8,620	7·3
1983	9,120	9·2
1984	9,650	9·9
1985	10,390	10·6
1986	11,220	15·9
1987	13,100	29·9
1988	13,670	30·4
1989	14,730	30·1
1990	16,030	29·3
1991	17,640	33·8
[4]1991	18,320	36·2

[1] Average salaries for all teachers (including heads and deputies) in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in England and Wales.
[2] Real terms percentage changes calculated on the basis of movements in the all items retail prices index.
[3] Average salary at highest value in calendar year, except for 1991 where the effect of staging the settlement is shown separately for April and December.
[4] December 1991, when the second stage of the 1991-92 pay settlement was implemented.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many teachers, and at what grades, he expects to earn more than £20,280 during the next financial year following the recent pay review body report.

Mr. Fallon: We estimate that approximately 182,000 teachers, some 47 per cent., will earn more than £20,280 per annum when the pay rises recommended by the school teachers review body take effect. Of these, some 28,000 will be head teachers, 31,000 deputy head teachers, 119,000 classroom teachers paid on the standard scale holding an incentive allowance, and the remaining 4,000 teachers paid

on the standard scale with the addition of both the inner London allowance and the inner London discretionary supplement.

Dyslexia

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the training given to teachers to deal with dyslexia.

Mr. Fallon: All courses of initial teacher training are now required to equip prospective teachers to teach the full range of pupils whom they are likely to encounter in an ordinary school and to introduce them to ways of identifying children with special education needs, including dyslexia. The Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education has also been asked to consider dyslexia specifically in its inquiry into the preparation of student teachers to teach reading. Its report will be published shortly. In-service training is also available for teachers of pupils with dyslexia. Training of teachers of pupils with special education needs in ordinary schools is one of the priorities supported by the Department through the grants for education support and training programme. The Department has also sponsored the production of an audio-visual pack aimed to assist teachers in ordinary schools to identify children with special education needs, one module of which is specifically concerned with dyslexia.

Sign Language

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) how many courses are run for sign language learners; and what plans he has to extend this number;

(2) whether he has any plans to increase the level of sign language support in mainstream schools;

(3) how many registered sign language practitioners there are in *(a)* Yorkshire and Humberside and *(b)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Fallon: The Education Act 1981 places the responsibility for making appropriate educational provision for children with special education needs on each local education authority. It is not for the Government to prescribe which form of communication should be employed in schools where there are pupils with hearing impairments, nor the level of support they require. Such decisions are best made in the light of local needs and circumstances.

Information is not available centrally about the number of courses for sign language learners or the number of registered sign language practitioners.

Statements of Attainment

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *42*, how he proposes to ensure comparability between English courses; what regulation he proposes to make to ensure that the omission of statements of attainment from examination does not change the range, competence or quality of the examination offered; and what regulatory body will be responsible for supervising such regulations.

Mr. Eggar: The School Examinations and Assessment Council will shortly be issuing criteria in English and the other core subjects with which the examining bodies will need to comply in drawing up syllabuses for the assessment of pupils starting key stage 4 courses from September 1992 for first examination in summer 1994. I am satisfied that these will ensure the broad comparability between syllabuses which will be required by the national curriculum assessment arrangements, to be specified in orders due to be made later this year, while giving scope for a certain amount of variation.

Higher Education

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish the proportion of school leavers going into higher education in *(a)* each London borough, *(b)* Greater London, *(c)* outer London, *(d)* inner London and *(e)* England for each year from 1980-81 to 1990-91.

Mr. Howarth: The proportions of school leavers from maintained schools whose intended destinations for the three-year period ending 1989-90 was a university or polytechnic course, for the areas requested, were as shown in the table. Information for earlier years is not readily available and to provide it would involve disproportionate cost. Information for 1990-91 is not yet available.

School Leavers—England
Aggregate of academic years 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90
Proportion of school leavers from maintained schools intending to enter higher education (University or Polytechnic)

	per cent.
Barking	3·0
Barnet	17·9
Bexley	8·1
Brent	11·2
Bromley	12·2
Croydon	8·9
Ealing	7·0
Enfield	13·3
Haringey	6·7
Harrow	4·0
Havering	5·5
Hillingdon	7·9
Hounslow	10·0
Kingston-upon-Thames	11·4
Merton	7·3
Newham	3·5
Redbridge	10·4
Richmond-upon-Thames	0·9
Sutton	12·0
Waltham Forest	4·5
Total Outer London	8·6
Inner London	5·6
All London	7·7
England	9·2

National Union of Students

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much money has been given in grants to the National Union of Students in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The National Union of Students is not supported by central Government grant.

Examination Statistics

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will publish the percentage of young people, as a proportion of school leavers, achieving (i) one or more grade G or better, (ii) five or more grade G or better and (iii) five or more grade C or better at GCSE/O-level/CSE in *(a)* each London borough/ILEA, *(b)* Greater London, *(c)* outer London, *(d)* inner London and *(e)* England for each year from 1980-81 to 1991-92;

(2) if he will publish the percentage of young people, as a proportion of the 17-year-old age group, achieving (i) one or more passes and (ii) three or more passes at A-level in *(a)* each London borough/ILEA, *(b)* Greater London, *(c)* outer London, *(d)* inner London and *(e)* England for each year from 1980-81 to 1990-91.

Mr. Eggar: The table shows the proportions of school leavers from maintained schools with the specified achievements in GCSE/O-level/CSE or A-level, according to the areas requested, for the three-year period ending 1989-90. Information for earlier years is not readily available and to provide it would involve disproportionate cost. Information for 1990-91 and 1991-92 is not yet available.

School leavers—England
Aggregate of academic years 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90
Proportion of school leavers from maintained schools attaining the levels shown (not mutually exclusive)

	GCSE			A-level/AS	
	1+A-G	5+A-G	5+A-C	1+A/AS	3+A/AS
Barking	79·0	58·5	13·6	7·7	3·5
Barnet	89·4	75·9	39·0	33·6	18·1
Bexley	90·0	77·1	30·2	17·1	10·3
Brent	86·0	62·2	23·3	18·8	8·6
Bromley	87·6	70·5	31·7	22·3	13·4
Croydon	85·8	67·5	22·9	18·1	9·5
Ealing	83·2	63·4	21·5	17·8	8·1
Enfield	91·6	76·3	31·5	23·9	12·3
Haringey	83·2	58·6	19·9	13·4	3·9
Harrow	96·5	87·8	44·1	8·1	6·3
Havering	92·1	76·9	28·6	14·7	7·2
Hillingdon	91·6	76·3	27·3	17·5	7·7
Hounslow	85·6	67·9	25·2	17·2	8·0
Kingston-upon-Thames	86·7	74·2	34·2	23·6	12·3
Merton	86·8	69·0	28·7	16·7	8·3
Newham	76·4	57·6	14·3	7·5	2·4
Redbridge	86·4	67·7	25·3	19·6	10·6
Richmond-upon-Thames	94·9	87·1	38·0	0·0	0·0
Sutton	94·6	77·8	37·0	25·5	13·3
Waltham Forest	87·0	66·2	17·7	9·6	5·5
Total Outer London	87·7	70·9	27·5	17·2	8·8
Inner London	76·7	53·7	17·4	11·8	4·4
All London	84·5	66·0	24·6	15·6	7·6
England	89·9	73·6	28·6	17·1	9·6

Teachers, Leeds

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will show the full-time equivalent number of teachers employed in *(a)* Leeds city council infant and primary schools, *(b)* Leeds city council middle schools and *(c)* Leeds city council secondary schools in (i) each year since 1974 and (ii) broken down into constituency areas.

Mr. Fallon: The full-time equivalent numbers of qualified teachers in maintained primary, middle and secondary schools in Leeds local education authority in January of each year are shown in the table. Information on constituency areas is not held centrally.

Full-time equivalent numbers of qualified teachers in maintained primary, middle and secondary schools in Leeds Local Education Authority—January 1974-1991.

(thousands)

	Primary[1]	Middle	Secondary
1974	2·5	1·2	2·5
1975	2·5	1·2	2·6
1976	2·5	1·2	2·7
1977	2·5	1·2	2·8
1978	2·5	1·2	2·8
1979	2·4	1·3	2·9
1980	2·6	1·4	2·9
1981	2·3	1·4	2·9
1982	2·1	1·3	2·8
1983	2·0	1·3	2·9
1984	2·0	1·2	2·9
1985	2·0	1·2	2·8
1986	2·2	1·1	2·8
1987	2·3	1·1	2·8
1988	2·4	1·1	2·7
1989	2·5	1·1	2·6
1990	2·6	1·0	2·5
1991	2·5	0·9	2·4

[1]Includes infant schools.

Student Statistics

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish the proportion of students aged *(a)* 16, *(b)* 17 and *(c)* 16 and 17 years participating in full-time or part-time education in (i) each London borough, (ii) Greater London, (iii) outer London, (iv) inner London and (v) England for each year since 1980-81.

Mr. Eggar: Data for students aged 16 and 17 separately for the years 1979-80 to 1989-90 for ILEA, individual outer London boroughs, the total of outer London boroughs and England are contained in DES statistics bulletins 9/86 and 14/91. Data for Greater London from 1981-82 to 1989-90 are available in bulletins 6/87 and 14/91. Copies of these bulletins are available in the Library. Data for individual inner London boroughs are not available because ILEA was the responsible education authority until 1 April 1990. The participation rates shown exclude independent schools.

Free School Meals

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many children are not currently eligible for free school meals but would have been before the Social Security Act 1986; and what would be the gross and net costs of restoring their right to free school meals.

Mr. Fallon: A variety of local education authority discretionary schemes existed prior to the implementation of the Social Security Act 1986. Consequently, it is not possible to estimate the number of children who would now be eligible for free school meals on that basis.

Adult Students

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many adult students have been or are at present on access courses leading to higher education during the years 1989-90, 1990-91, and 1991-92 in England.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 25 February 1992]:* There has been a rapid growth in the number of access courses leading to higher education in recent years. Recorded student numbers show that there were 7,000 students aged 19 or over on such courses in November 1989 and 10,000 in November 1990. Data for 1991 are not yet available.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Development Assistance

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will give an estimate for 1991 of the ratio of Britain's official development assistance to gross national product.

Mrs. Chalker: For 1991 we expect to at least maintain the average aid-GNP ratio of the previous four years of 0·30 per cent.—an indication that the overseas aid budget has in recent years been growing broadly in line with the economy.

EC Aid Programmes

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the increase since 1979 in Britain's contribution to the European Community's aid programmes.

Mrs. Chalker: In 1979, our contribution was £118 million, while in 1990, which is the latest year for which we have final figures, it was £333 million. That is an increase of over 180 per cent. in cash terms, or over 25 per cent. in real terms. The European Community is an increasingly important channel for our aid. We are devoting considerable time and attention to ensuring that the quality of this aid increases in line with the quantities involved.

International Organisations

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, columns *649-52*, what was the percentage change *(a)* between 1979 and 1990, and *(b)* between 1989 and 1990 in the United Kingdom's contribution in 1990 prices to (i) the International Labour Organisation, (ii) the Food and Agriculture Organisation, (iii) the International Food and Agriculture Development, (iv) the United Nations Development Programme, (v) the World Food Programme, (vi) UNICEF, (vii) the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, (viii) the United Nations Food for Population Articles and (ix) the United Nations Environmental Programme.

Mrs. Chalker: The figures requested are as follows:

Organisations	*Percentage change*	
	1979-1990	*1989-1990*
International Labour Organisation	19·7	−3·3
Food and Agriculture Organisation	73·7	3·3
International Fund for Agricultural Development	—	−24·5
United Nations Development Programme	−57·5	−3·6
World Food Programme	[1]—	−76·2
United Nations Children's Fund	−43·7	−29·7
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	−2·9	−6·7
United Nations Fund for Population Activities	[2]−65·3	[2]−49·6
United Nations Environmental Programme	124·3	−7·6

[1] Contributions to the World Food Programme include subscription payments, commodity purchase and, from 1987, food aid. Prior to 1987 the food aid channelled through WFP could not be distinguished from other food aid, and therefore is not included in this table.

[2] Contributions to UNFPA are paid in two instalments per financial year, but only one was paid in the calendar year 1990. The balance of £3 million was paid in February 1991.

PRIME MINISTER

Sports Clubs

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Prime Minister whether he intends to extend to England, Scotland and Wales legislation which would require cricket clubs, bowling clubs, yacht clubs, football clubs, etc., to furnish to the police copies of the annual general meeting of the club, or of the meetings of the committee of management or governing body of the club, on the lines of current legislation applying in Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister: No.

Olympic Games

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the outcome of his further meeting with representatives of the Manchester Olympic bid committee.

The Prime Minister: I am delighted to announce that the Government are backing Manchester's Olympic bid. We will be committing £55 million towards the bid and provision of sports facilities in advance of the nomination. This will contribute to the construction of the Olympic arena and a national cycling arena and will allow us to acquire and prepare the Olympic stadium site.

We aim to use the games to spearhead the regeneration of east Manchester. We will now work urgently with Manchester city council to identify how the full range of Government programmes can be brought to bear for the regeneration of the area and the best arrangements for securing delivery of this and the Olympic facilities themselves.

Success cannot be guaranteed: the competition will be intense. But we intend to win.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Testing

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the results of the atmospheric tests following the British nuclear teast codenamed Rousanne at the Nevada test site in 1981 as they relate to the amount of radioactive material vented to the atmosphere.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There was no venting from the 1981 British test, codenamed Rousanne.

RAF Valley

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the air sea rescue service based at RAF Valley, following his statement made on 19 February about defence equipment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Final decisions on the structure of the RAF search and rescue force have yet to be taken. I cannot, therefore, comment on the possible implications for individual search and rescue flights.

Service Men (Pay)

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the percentage change in real terms in the pay upon appointment of *(a)* a field marshal, *(b)* major generals, *(c)* colonels, *(d)* captains, *(e)* second lieutenants, *(f)* sergeants, *(g)* corporals and *(h)* privates between 1970-71 and 1979-80, and 1979-80 to the latest convenient date.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The percentage changes in real terms in pay upon appointment are set out in the table.

	[1]*1970-71 to [1]1979-80* Per cent	[1]*1979-80 to [1]1991-92* Per cent
Field Marshal	−24·3	+83·3
Major General	−30·5	+57·1
Colonel	−12·1	+38·6
Captain	− 4·8	+28·9
2nd Lieutenant	−13·6	+17·9
Sergeant	+ 9·0	+17·5
Corporal	+10·7	+14·9
Private	+11·0	+ 1·0

[1] Financial year.

WALES

Monmouth Borough Council

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding his reduction of the standard spending assessment of Monmouth borough council.

Mr. David Hunt: The chief executive of Monmouth borough council wrote to me on 18 February. I will be responding shortly.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many hearing aids were provided free by each health authority in Wales in 1989, 1990 and 1991;

(2) if he will list those health authorities in Wales which charge patients for the supply of replacement hearing aids when the original has been lost or mislaid.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not held centrally.

However, where hearing aids are supplied to patients on loan, the health authority has discretion to charge for the cost of replacement for lost equipment.

Listed Building, Chepstow

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the recent destruction of rich archaeological deposits under a listed building in Bridge street, Chepstow.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Works on buildings requiring listed building consent are primarily a matter for local planning authorities, in this case Monmouth borough council.

Nevill Hall Hospital

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding proposals to introduce charges for car parking at Nevill Hall hospital, Abergavenny.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I have received one representation concerning these proposals.

Homelessness

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many registered homeless households have been allocated *(a)* chalet accommodation and *(b)* prefabricated housing by each local authority in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is not available centrally.

Council House Waiting Lists

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures for each local authority in Wales showing the greatest length of time spent by an individual on a current council house waiting list.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is not available centrally.

Home Ownership Schemes

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales of the transferable discount housing schemes operational in Wales, how many provide properties that

have been purchased *(a)* within the schemes' boundaries and *(b)* outside the schemes' boundaries; and if he will publish a list of the number of properties within each category.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The available data relate to the pilot scheme in Cardiff which provided seven grants to tenants to purchase properties, all in the authority's area.

Empty Housing

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many furnished properties owned by *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* housing associations in Wales have remained empty for more than six months.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is not available centrally.

A487

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects work will start on the improvement of the A487 trunk road between Furnace Bridge and Eglwys Fach in Cardiganshire; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The scheme is planned to start between April 1994 and March 1997.

Ceredigion Ports

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to improve the ports in Ceredigion; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: No. Improvements to ports are matters for the port operators to take forward as they see fit.

Bilingual Schools

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children attend bilingual schools in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The latest statistics available—1990—show that 104,616 children attend schools where some or all the teaching is through the medium of Welsh. This represents an increase of more than 1,000 pupils on the previous year.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will introduce a scheme of relief against the uniform business rate in Wales for those whose businesses have had to close because of financial failure; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make transitional relief against the uniform business rate available to new occupiers of existing shop and business premises in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have no plans to do so.

Wind Farms

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will introduce planning guidelines to ensure that the effect upon local television and radio reception is taken into account by local planning authorities when considering applications for the construction of wind farms in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: A draft planning policy guidance note on renewable energy, including an annex on wind energy, was recently issued for public consultation. Paragraphs 52 to 56 of the annex give guidance on television and radio reception issues advising that

"provided careful attention is paid to siting, wind turbines should not cause any significant problems of electromagnetic interference".

The consultation period expired on 12 February and the responses received are being assessed.

Heartbeat Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to publish the evaluation study of the first five years of Heartbeat Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 24 February 1992]:* The Heartbeat Wales programme is a multi-faceted project. Its evaluation is a complex process and is being undertaken in separate stages. The Health Promotion Authority for Wales—HPAW—published a technical report on "Recent Trends in Lifestyles in Wales 1985-1990" in February 1992 and compares 1985, 1988 and 1990 date on diet, smoking, alcohol, exercise weight and obesity by age and sex. The authority expects to publish two further technical reports in March 1992 examining changes in lifestyle by social class and sex, and by health authority district and sex.

By March 1993, the HPAW plans to publish a further four technical reports summarising community survey data and one technical report on clinical survey data. The final evaluation report is expected to be available by early summer 1993.

I am placing a copy of the February report in the Library of the House, and have arranged for copies of future reports to be placed similarly.

SCOTLAND

Inverclyde Enterprise Zone

16. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received concerning the Inverclyde enterprise zone; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Recent representations have related to the possible location within Inverclyde enterprise zone of the proposed expansion of the Registers of Scotland. It has now been decided to locate this operation at Cowglen, Glasgow.

I met the hon. Member and representatives of Inverclyde development corporation on 23 December to discuss prospects for the Inverclyde enterprise zone.

Bus Lanes

17. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he plans to meet representatives of the Bus and Coach Council for Scotland to discuss its report, " Buses mean Business", on bus lanes in cities.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I hope to meet the Bus and Coach Council for Scotland on 9 March.

Defence

18. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the action which he proposes to take in relation to the report by Scottish Enterprise on defence in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The report now received by Scottish Enterprise is an important contribution to the development of the defence industries initiative. Information from that study will be used by Scottish Enterprise to take forward work already in hand with local enterprise companies and defence companies to identify practical steps to help companies and communities adapt to the changing demand for defence-related goods and services.

Fishing Industry

19. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to meet fishing industry representatives in Scotland to discuss the future structure of the industry.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My noble Friend the Minister with responsibility for fisheries in Scotland will meet representatives of the fishing industry before the Fisheries Council meeting scheduled for 3 April.

Forestry Commission

20. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hectares of Forestry Commission land have been sold off since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Forestry Commission had sold 155,000 hectares of land in the decade ended 1991.

Skye Bridge

21. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the cost of contract cancellation to the public purse arising from the cancellation of the commercial agreement entered into between his Department and the construction consortium for the purposes of building a toll-funded bridge to the Isle of Skye; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No cancellation costs arise, because the contract has not been cancelled.

Hospital Fund Raising

22. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what *is his estimate of the amount of* money being raised by charities for Scottish hospitals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Just under one half of 1 per cent. of health service funding is contributed from charitable sources. The NHS is very appreciative of the support which is provided in this way.

Scottish Power

23. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had recently with the chairman of Scottish Power on the future of electricity generation and distribution.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend meets the chairman of Scottish Power from time to time when a range of issues is discussed.

Drug Offences

24. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland, in each of the last five years, have been convicted, and what was their average sentence, for dealing, providing, pushing, selling, supplying or trafficking in drugs; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on convictions for drugs offences is published annually in "Statistics of the misuse of drugs: seizures and offenders dealt with, United Kingdom, Scotland tables", copies of which are in the Library.

Financial Services

25. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of people employed in the financial services sector in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Lothian region.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The latest figures available, showing the number of people employed in the financial services sector, come from the 1989 Employment Department census of employment. The figures are *(a)* 83,856 for Scotland and *(b)* 27,566 for Lothian region.

Council House Sales

26. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many council houses have been sold to sitting tenants in Scotland since May 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Between April 1979 and September 1991 nearly 234,000 public sector houses in Scotland were sold to sitting tenants. Included in that figure are nearly 173,000 sales by local authorities.

Nurse Training

27. **Mr. Harry Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to meet health service unions in Scotland to discuss nurse training.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend has no plans to meet health service unions in Scotland to discuss nurse training. Nurse training will, of course, change radically when we introduce Project 2000 courses later this year. My right hon. Friend also announced in February last year our plans for the future funding and organisation of nurse education and training following the enactment of the current legislative changes.

Renfrewshire Enterprise Company

28. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with the Renfrewshire enterprise company regarding training and industrial development.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I had a very useful and constructive meeting with the chairman of Renfrewshire Enterprise and his colleagues on 14 October last year at which a wide range of topics relating to training and industrial development were discussed. My right hon. Friend and I also have frequent discussions with the chairman and members of Scottish Enterprise about developments in the Scottish economy generally.

Unemployment

29. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he is taking to solve unemployment in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The key to increased employment is a prosperous and productive economy. The Government are firmly committed to removing the barriers to economic growth and to the stimulation of economic development, through various measures including the activities of Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and their networks of local enterprise companies.

In relation to unemployed individuals, this Government have introduced the most comprehensive range of measures there has ever been in this country to help people back to work. The Employment Service provides a wide range of services which result in two thirds of people who become unemployed leave unemployment within six months. The Employment Service also manages the employment action programme, delivered through local enterprise companies as a complement to the range of training schemes which they offer and which make a major contribution to helping young people and the long-term unemployed to improve their prospects of entering employment.

The effectiveness of these measures in Scotland can be seen from the fact that the number of those unemployed for over a year rose in Scotland by only 8·4 per cent. between January 1991 and January 1992, less than a fifth of the average for Great Britain as a whole.

Dumfries-Stranraer Rail Link

30. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what application he has received for support for the reinstatement of direct rail links between Dumfries and Stranraer; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has received representations seeking support, in principle, for the restoration of the railway line between Dumfries and Stranraer. Investment in railways is, however, a matter for British Rail. I understand that British Rail do not consider that this particular project could be economically or financially justified in the foreseeable future.

The Union

31. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received in support of the maintenance of the Union between Scotland and England.

Mr. Lang: In the past six months I have received 47 letters supporting the maintenance of the Union between Scotland and England. That is more than I have received in favour of independence.

NHS Building

32. **Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hospitals and other health board facilities have been built in Scotland since 1979; and at what cost.

Mr. Lang: Eighty-seven major hospital building projects have been completed since 1979 at a cost of £482 million. In addition to hospital new build and redevelopment, completed projects have included hospital service facilities, residences and energy saving schemes.

In the same period a large number of minor hospital projects and developments were completed. There has also been a major investment in information technology and a special programme to tackle backlog maintenance worth over £200; and significant new investment in health centres and colleges of nursing.

Capital investment in the NHS in Scotland has increased by 50 per cent. in real terms from 1979 to the year end 1991-92 and a total of nearly £230 million has been allocated to health boards in Scotland for capital expenditure for 1992-93.

A further 41 major projects with a value of £300 million are currently in the pipeline, representing the largest building programme in the history of the NHS in Scotland.

Fishing Industry

33. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for the restructuring of the fishing industry in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The future structure of the fishing industry in Scotland is linked to the need for the United Kingdom to develop a new multi-annual guidance programme for the fishing fleet for the period 1993-96. This is currently under discussion with the European Commission.

Constitutional Reform

34. **Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received in favour of a devolved Scottish assembly.

Mr. Lang: In the past six months I have received 55 representations supporting a devolved Scottish assembly, and 35 against a devolved Scottish assembly.

35. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss the future governance of Scotland.

Mr. Lang: I meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, regularly, but it has not sought a meeting specifically to discuss the future governance of Scotland.

Departmental Officials

36. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the cost to his Department of *(a)* arranging for officials to be in attendance at the Scottish Grand Committee in Edinburgh on 24 February and *(b)* arranging for officials to be in attendance for Scottish Question Time in Westminster today, 26 February.

Mr. Lang: As Scottish Office officials in attendance at Scottish Grand Committee meetings in Edinburgh are deployed from other duties, my Department does not bear any significant extra costs in respect of their attendance. Officials attending Scottish Question Time do so in pursuit of their duties and, therefore, as a rule, extra costs are not involved.

Manufacturing Output

37. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland by how much manufacturing output in Scotland has risen since 1979.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Manufacturing output in Scotland has risen by 11·8 per cent. in the 11 years between 1979 and 1990.

Health Board Finances

38. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairmen of health boards to discuss financial allocations.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My last meeting with health board chairmen was on 31 January 1992.

National Health Service Trusts

39. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any plans to meet the chairmen of the Scottish National Health Service trusts to discuss operation of the trusts.

Mr. Lang: In my statement on 3 December approving the trust applications I indicated that I would be maintaining close contact with the trusts as they moved towards operational status on 1 April. I have already met the trust chairmen on several occasions and further meetings are planned.

Alternative Medicine

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the development of homoeopathic and alternative medicine within the Scottish health service.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The decision on whether to practise medicine using homoeopathic or other alternative treatments is for individual doctors. Doctors in contract with the National Health Service can provide these treatments for their patients in the same way as they provide conventional medicines.

Evening Primrose Oil

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether primrose oil for the treatment of arthritis is included in the list of items available on prescription under the national health service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Medicinal products which the Licensing Authority has on advice judged to be safe and efficacious are generally available on the NHS. One evening primrose oil product is licensed for the treatment of atopic eczema and is prescribable on the NHS for that purpose. No evening primrose oil product is licensed for the treatment of arthritis.

The Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances advises the Health Departments as to the circumstances in which unlicensed products may be regarded as drugs and has considered evening primrose oil products from time to time but has not been satisfied that they have a therapeutic use in the treatment of arthritis.

Patients Charter

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of the contract with the Post Office to distribute each health board's local version of the patients charter.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The final cost of the contract with the Post Office will not be known until the distribution exercise is complete.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost for each health board of producing and distributing their local version of the patients charter.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Detailed information is not available centrally.

A7 (Accidents)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all recorded road accidents which occurred on the A7 between Hawick and Langholm, indicating the location and date of each accident for the last two years for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* The information requested on injury accidents on the A7 between Hawick and Langholm for the two year period October 1989 to September 1991 is as follows:

Location: OS Grid Reference			
East	*North*	*Date*	*Severity*
34599	61094	6 October 1989	Serious
33870	59730	17 November 1989	Slight
34060	60171	27 December 1989	Slight
34207	60690	12 February 1990	Fatal
33680	58940	16 March 1990	Slight
34776	61309	21 March 1990	Serious
34771	61306	16 May 1990	Slight
34051	60118	24 June 1990	Serious
34485	60975	6 August 1990	Slight

East	North	Date	Severity
34054	60329	13 August 1990	Slight
34070	60282	16 August 1990	Slight
33710	59090	11 September 1990	Serious
34036	60458	6 October 1990	Slight
34023	60416	13 November 1990	Slight
34023	60416	5 December 1990	Serious
35214	61335	14 December 1990	Slight
34040	60374	11 January 1991	Slight
34729	61242	18 January 1991	Slight
33710	59110	6 March 1991	Slight
34060	60547	22 March 1991	Slight
34528	61050	4 April 1991	Slight
34845	61382	20 April 1991	Serious
33690	58580	22 July 1991	Slight
34587	61091	4 August 1991	Serious
34610	61119	10 August 1991	Slight
34062	60547	2 September 1991	Slight
34643	61160	14 September 1991	Slight
34528	61051	26 September 1991	Slight
34733	61250	27 September 1991	Slight

Figures for 1991 are provisional.

Traffic Systems, Hawick

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement outlining the current timetable for consideration of the internal traffic management systems in Hawick; and when he now expects to be in a position to authorise the funds and capital consents required to enable work to start to alleviate the current congestion.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 19 February 1991]:* I expect a report on proposals to provide improved traffic management in Hawick to be submitted to the Secretary of State by Borders regional council in the course of the next two to three months. Until this report is available it is not possible to estimate the level of funding which would be required.

Low-energy Lighting

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will make it his policy progressively to introduce low-energy lighting in all the buildings operated by his Department.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 25 February 1992]:* The Scottish Office requires that any new buildings acquired should incorporate low-energy lighting systems. In existing buildings low-energy lighting is fitted wherever possible and this will continue as resources permit when refurbishment work is undertaken.

New Towns

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the proposed wind-up of the Scottish new towns.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[pursuant to the reply, 29 January 1992, c. 623.]* I made orders on 24 February for the wind-up of East Kilbride and Glenrothes development corporations. The orders, which will come into effect on 1 March 1992, provide for the wind-up of both corporations to be completed by 31 December 1995.

Housing Support Grants

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the amount of housing support grant given to each Scottish local authority in each years since 1980 on the basis of the amount of council stock; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Housing support grant is a deficit subsidy payable to those local housing authorities whose estimated housing revenue account expenditure would otherwise exceed their estimated housing revenue account income. The table shows the grant entitlements of individual authorities in each financial year from 1980-81 to 1992-93 divided by the number of houses to which the relevant housing revenue account in the appropriate year applied or is estimated to apply.

	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
Berwickshire	457	366	245	238	183	171	78	90	37	21	0	0	0
Ettrick and Lauderdale	352	235	114	79	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Roxburgh	315	247	191	207	213	223	166	200	208	259	261	233	154
Tweeddale	172	66	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clackmannan	190	133	73	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Falkirk	223	132	45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	5
Stirling	146	77	101	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	12
Annandale and Eskdale	283	247	274	311	330	347	275	270	323	364	332	288	264
Nithsdale	104	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stewartry	260	217	169	169	147	142	106	164	179	230	198	81	97
Wigtown	241	164	96	55	44	21	0	61	96	132	148	115	92
Dunfermline	260	122	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kirkcaldy	247	117	27	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North East Fife	206	122	107	41	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Aberdeen	276	241	180	96	80	60	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Banff and Buchan	430	336	258	193	157	132	47	53	22	12	0	0	0
Gordon	468	390	377	294	342	326	337	506	602	689	691	707	666
Kincardine and Deeside	376	265	232	279	246	276	224	364	458	544	534	520	447
Moray	401	321	209	182	167	142	66	96	61	55	0	0	0
Badenoch and Strathspey	431	392	457	466	442	446	352	429	367	389	400	335	334
Caithness	240	207	200	204	207	191	170	197	268	328	360	338	318
Inverness	325	226	198	182	191	224	153	173	207	302	310	267	212
Lochaber	526	522	402	392	365	431	471	458	622	789	914	976	956

	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
Nairn	295	219	182	241	210	206	169	196	257	322	335	293	231
Ross and Cromarty	672	672	559	500	527	562	518	545	624	694	717	712	711
Skye and Lochalsh	470	430	434	439	534	626	747	1,010	1,275	1,495	1,606	1,622	1,608
Sutherland	422	303	285	265	277	307	308	376	463	572	588	577	486
East Lothian	311	194	130	67	26	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Edinburgh	221	140	42	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	14
Midlothian	252	136	70	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Lothian	216	99	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Argyll and Bute	424	332	331	307	278	264	171	215	202	229	140	84	45
Bearsden and Milngavie	251	106	0	0	0	0	0	29	73	167	195	201	49
Clydebank	341	276	186	157	151	152	70	69	94	96	67	48	17
Clydesdale	170	60	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	152	27	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	175	79	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cunninghame	198	118	32	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Dumbarton	213	89	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
East Kilbride	209	61	0	0	0	0	0	47	26	0	0	56	96
Eastwood	152	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	7
Glasgow	285	254	217	191	191	194	131	91	154	197	165	160	127
Hamilton	218	141	67	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Inverclyde	310	225	155	96	60	29	0	0	0	0	0	9	10
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	225	103	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Kyle and Carrick	237	155	50	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Monklands	152	149	113	60	69	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Motherwell	205	143	83	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Renfrew	166	55	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Strathkelvin	217	141	111	31	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Angus	298	172	86	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dundee	214	131	45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Perth and Kinross	190	80	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Orkney Islands	729	758	591	509	531	549	463	513	605	568	588	478	283
Shetland Islands	755	993	1,015	915	1,049	1,054	1,129	1,225	1,427	1,593	1,729	1,811	1,809
Western Isles	505	519	541	703	762	881	883	1,066	1,201	1,579	1,598	1,676	1,841

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pension Age

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has conducted any survey of the proportion of men who would continue working after they reached pension age if it was lowered to 64, 63, 62, 61 and 60 years.

Miss Widdecombe: No; but the discussion document on equalising state pension age contained information on activity rates in this age group, and a survey commissioned by the Department from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys will contain further information about individuals who have already retired, or plan to retire, earlier than the current state pension age. Since national insurance retirement pensions are no longer subject to an earnings rule, there is of course no necessary association between the decision whether or not to retire and the decision about whether or not to draw state retirement pension.

Poll Tax

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost in 1991-92 of allowing an earnings disregard of *(a)* £5 or *(b)* £10 to occupational pensions in the determination of their poll tax rebate.

Miss Widdecombe: Information for 1991-92 consistent with the departmental report could be provided only at disproportionate cost. In line with the overall expenditure forecasts in the departmental report (Cm 1914) the estimated costs at 1992-93 prices and benefit levels would be:

(a) £35 million
(b) £65 million

Source: Modelled using data drawn from the 1987-8-9 Family Expenditure Surveys.

Training Schemes

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances a single parent who is receiving income support can retain their eligibility for that benefit if they participate in European social fund vocational training courses provided either by *(a)* voluntary organisations or local authorities or *(b)* training and enterprise councils/local enterprise companies; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The European social fund provides financial support to training and employment initiatives, including employment training. Lone parents will normally remain eligible for income support while participating in a training course which is funded under the European social fund. However, any payments made in connection with the course will be taken into account in the normal way, depending on whether these are made under section 2 of the Employment and Training Act 1973,

or are otherwise made on a contractual or voluntary basis. In particular, any training premium, travelling expenses or living away from home allowance paid to employment training participants is disregarded. Those lone parents who are attending a non-government training course and whose youngest child is aged 16 or over will normally be required to be available for employment or to provide medical evidence that they are incapable of work.

Sickness and Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the numbers of *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* in total claiming (i) sickness benefit and (ii) invalidity benefit each year since 1979; and what was the percentage change each year in each category.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is in the table:

	Claimants	*Men*	*Percentage change*	*Women*	*Percentage change*	*All people*	*Percentage change*
2 June 1979	SB	355,500	−10·8	132,300	0·2	487,800	−8·0
	IVB	504,500	9·1	106,500	10·0	611,000	9·3
31 May 1980	SB	312,900	−12·0	137,400	3·9	450,000	−7·7
	IVB	506,200	0·3	108,800	2·2	615,000	0·7
30 May 1981	SB	289,990	−7·3	119,994	−12·7	409,984	−9·0
	IVB	516,511	2·0	116,464	7·0	632,975	2·9
29 May 1982	SB	317,740	9·6	151,433	26·2	469,173	14·4
	IVB	553,107	7·1	130,400	12·0	683,507	8·0
2 April 1983	SB	280,675	−11·7	126,923	−16·2	407,598	−13·[illegible]
	IVB	592,907	7·2	144,007	10·4	736,914	[illegible]·8
31 March 1984	SB	173,300	−38·3	74,200	−41·5	247,500	−39·3
	IVB	638,300	7·7	159,100	10·5	797,400	8·2
30 March 1985	SB	156,954	−9·4	68,254	−8·0	225,208	−9·0
	IVB	672,681	5·4	176,667	11·0	849,348	6·5
5 April 1986	SB	162,200	3·3	75,300	10·3	237,500	5·5
	IVB	706,100	5·0	193,300	9·4	899,400	5·9
4 April 1987	SB	123,000	−24·2	64,200	−14·7	187,200	−21·2
	IVB	754,400	6·8	213,600	10·5	968,000	7·6
2 April 1988	SB	137,600	11·9	90,200	40·5	227,800	21·7
	IVB	807,800	7·1	239,700	12·2	1,047,500	8·2
1 April 1989	SB	151,600	10·2	114,800	27·3	266,400	16·9
	IVB	859,700	6·4	266,400	11·1	1,126,100	7·5
31 March 1990	SB	168,900	11·4	139,800	21·8	308,700	15·9
	IVB	916,900	6·7	292,500	9·8	1,209,400	7·4

Notes:
1. SB = sickness benefit.
2. IVB = invalidity benefit.
3. Figures based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants at the dates given.
4. From 6 April 1983 statutory sick pay was introduced for a maximum of eight weeks sickness absence in a tax year. From 6 April 1986 statutory sick pay is payable for up to 28 weeks in any one period of incapacity for work.
5. Totals include people not entitled to sickness or invalidity benefit, but who receive incapacity credits.

Vocational Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) whether a person who has been paid a training allowance on a European social fund-funded vocational training course provided by a voluntary organisation or local authority, who was immediately prior to entry to the training scheme receiving a disability benefit can immediately requalify for that disability benefit when he or she finishes the course; and if he will make a statement;

(2) in what circumstances a person who is receiving either severe disability allowance, invalidity benefit or income support with a disability premium, may retain his or her eligibility for that benefit if he or she participates in European social fund vocational training courses provided either by *(a)* voluntary organisations or local authorities or *(b)* training and enterprise councils/local enterprise companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The European social fund provides financial support to training and employment initiatives, including employment training.

A participant in employment training receives a training allowance which maintains the same level of payment as severe disablement allowance, invalidity benefit, or income support with a disability premium, in payment immediately before the start of the course, plus a £10 training premium.

A participant in a non-government course partly funded by the European social fund, who is in receipt of severe disablement allowance or invalidity benefit, must continue to satisfy the normal conditions of entitlement for those benefits. The principal condition is that the person must continue to be incapable of work.

A person receiving income support with a disability premium may retain eligibility for the premium, whatever the nature of the training, if he is blind or receiving attendance or mobility allowance or, from April, disability living allowance. In addition, a person who was entitled to a disability premium before he started employment training because he had invalidity benefit or severe disablement allowance, or had been incapable of work for 28 weeks or more, may continue to be entitled to the premium during that training even if they are no longer treated as incapable of work.

Where a person's invalidity benefit or severe disablement allowance has been withdrawn, due to attendance at a non-government funded course, he may requalify immediately where the break has been for eight weeks or less.

Entitlement to industrial injuries benefit, mobility allowance, attendance allowance (from April, disability living allowance) and the basic war disablement pension are unaffected whatever type of training a person undertakes.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security under what circumstances unemployed claimants who are receiving *(a)* unemployment benefit and *(b)* income support can participate in European social fund vocational training courses which lead to national vocational qualifications or credits towards them without losing their entitlement to their benefit payments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Unemployment benefit (UB) claimants must continue to satisfy the normal conditions of entitlement in order to receive UB while engaged in training. This means that they must continue to seek work actively during the course and be prepared to terminate the course immediately a job vacancy becomes available.

Income support claimants undertaking non-governmental training courses must continue to satisfy the normal conditions of entitlement. The principal conditions are the availability for work and actively seeking work requirements, as for UB. Those participating in governmental training courses such as those provided under the employment training programme are exempt from the availability and actively seeking work conditions for income support purposes. The European social fund may contribute financial support to either governmental or non-governmental courses.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what new regulations and procedures were introduced to protect the benefits and training premium of unemployed income support claimants who participated in employment training; and which of these regulations apply to any benefits or training allowances received by an unemployed income support claimant who participates in a European social fund-funded vocational training course provided either by *(a)* voluntary organisations or local authorities, or by *(b)* training and enterprise councils/ local enterprise companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: A participant in employment training (ET) receives a training allowance which maintains the same level of payment as the income support or unemployment benefit in payment immediately before the start of the course plus a £10 training premium. Income support participants continue to qualify for housing benefit and the range of other benefits to which income support is a passport. The training premium, any travelling—and usually living away from home—expenses reimbursed to the claimant, are also disregarded in the calculation of income for income support purposes. A participant in a non-governmental course who is in receipt of income support or unemployment benefit, must continue to satisfy the normal conditions of entitlement for benefits for unemployment. The principal conditions are that the participant must continue to seek work actively during the course and be prepared to terminate the course immediately a job vacancy becomes available to him.

The European social fund provides financial support to a wide range of training and employment initiatives, both governmental—including ET—and non-governmental. The benefit rules apply regardless of the type of organisation providing the course.

Family Credit

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how employed status youth training or employment training trainees should make a claim for family credit; what is the best information he has about the number of employed status trainees who are claiming family credit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Employed status YT and ET trainees can make a claim for family credit on form FC1 in the same way as any other employed person. No information is available about the number of employed status trainees receiving family credit.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total number of employees in his Department; and how many are *(a)* black and *(b)* disabled.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department, including its agencies, asks staff to complete questionnaires on their ethnic origins on a voluntary basis. As at 1 April 1991, 3,331 of the 67,178 staff who have responded to the questionnaire were from ethnic minorities.

As at 1 June 1991, the Department, including its agencies, employed 84,152 staff of whom 1,465 were registered as disabled. There is no information on staff with disabilities who choose not to register.

Child Benefit

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the objectives of child benefit.

Mr. Jack: Child benefit is paid to all families with children in recognition of the fact that at all levels of income such families face greater expenditure than others. It is, and will remain, a strong element in our policies for family support. For less well-off families, this universal help is supplemented by extra help through the income-related benefits.

Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security to what class of national insurance credits people who are being paid a training allowance and are participating in a European social fund course run by a local authority or voluntary organisation are entitled; how they ensure that they are credited with them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: An individual participating in a European social fund course will be entitled to Class 1 national insurance credits for each week of training, provided that he reached the age of 18 before the beginning of the tax year in which the course commenced, the course is full time and, at the outset, it was not expected to continue for more than 12 months.

People on training courses run by a local authority or voluntary organisation which satisfy the conditions for the award of credits should make an individual application for these credits. Form CF55C for this purpose may be obtained from the Department's local offices.

Sign Language

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many staff in Department of Social Security offices have sign language skills.

Mr. Scott: The provision of customer services in local offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, and Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive of the Contributions Agency. They will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies of their letters will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Pensioners (Benefits)

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners were dependent on supplementary benefit in Scotland in 1979; and how many were dependent on income support on the latest date for which figures are available.

Miss Widdecombe: In November 1979 there were 160,000 supplementary benefit claim units in Scotland with a claimant or partner aged 60 or over. In May 1990, there were 168,000 income support claim units in Scotland with a claimant or partner aged 60 or over as recent improvements in income support have enabled more less well-off pensioners to become entitled.

Note: In 1990 there were 25,000 more people in Scotland aged 60 or over than in 1979.

Source: Supplementary Benefit Annual Statistical Inquiry November 1979.
Income Support Annual Statistical Inquiry May 1990.

Income Support

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost in 1992-93 of *(a)* restoring entitlement to income support for all 16 and 17-year-olds, at the current benefit rate for under 25-year-olds and *(b)* raising the income support personal allowance for people aged 18 to 24 years to the level of the personal allowance for those aged 25 years and over.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 7 February 1992]:* Information on the cost of restoring entitlement to income support to 16 and 17-year-olds is not available.

The estimated cost of increasing the rate for 18 to 24-year-olds to that paid to people aged 25 or over is £340 million.

Source: Modelled using data drawn from the 1987, 1988 and 1989 family expenditure surveys and the Department's annual statistical inquiry for 1990, at 1992-93 prices and benefit levels.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 27 February 1992

NATIONAL FINANCE

Non-taxpayers

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many single people and married couples do not pay tax in 1991-92.

Mr. Maude: There are about 6·6 million single people not liable to income tax and about 4·1 million married couples where neither spouse is liable to tax.

Car Tax

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost to the revenue in *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93, giving in each case the first and full year costs, of a one per cent. cut in car tax, in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The requested estimates are as shown. They use the autumn statement forecast and are consistent with the methodology used in table 4·8 in chapter 4 of the 1991 autumn statement.

Revenue effect of 1 per cent. cut in car tax (£ million)

	1991-92	*1992-93*
First year	−125	−130
Full year	−140	−150

Child Care Tax Allowances

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in 1992-93 and in a full year of extending the exemption of workplace nurseries from income tax as a benefit in kind to all forms of empioyer-provided or subsidised child care.

Mr. Maude: The annual cost would be approximately £5 million at current levels of provision and subsidies for child care. This estimate takes no account of behavioural effects, which could be substantial.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the revenue yield of putting the standard rate of VAT on funeral payments.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Standard rating those elements of funeral expenses which are presently exempt from value added tax would raise an estimated £40 million in 1991-92.

Income Tax and NI Liability

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest estimates of how many people with gross incomes of over £100,000 pay *(a)* a national insurance contributions bill and *(b)* a total income tax and national insurance contributions bill, of less than (i) 35 per cent., (ii) 30 per cent., (iii) 25 per cent., (iv) 20 per cent., (v) 15 per cent., (vi) 10 per cent. and (vii) 5 per cent. of their gross incomes, in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maude: Available figures relate to the estimated 150,000 taxpayers in 1991-92 with gross incomes of £80,000 and above. Nearly all of these taxpayers pay less than 5 per cent. of their gross income in national insurance contributions. Estimates of combined income tax and national insurance contribution liabilities are that 60,000 have an effective rate above 35 per cent., 80,000 have an effective rate between 30 and 35 per cent. and the remaining 10,000 have an effective rate between 25 and 30 per cent.

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 12 February, *Official Report*, columns *521-22*, whether there is any proposal to undertake manual data exchange between tax authorities in other European countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: In accordance with the Council directive of 19 December 1977 (77/799/EEC), competent authorities of the member states may exchange certain information to enable them to assess taxpayers correctly. These exchanges are subject to certain safeguards to preserve the confidentiality of the information and were given legislative effect in section 77 of the Finance Act 1978.

The directive was extended to VAT on 6 December 1979 (79/1070/EEC) and all exchanges are subject to the confidentiality safeguards of directive 77/799/EEC. Directive 79/1070/EEC was implemented by section 17(2) of the Finance Act 1980. There is currently a proposal to extend directive 77/799/EEC to include excise duties on manufactured tobacco, alcohol and alcoholic beverages and mineral oils.

Taxation

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give figures for each standard region of England, and for Scotland and Wales, for a one-earner family with two children on *(a)* average male earnings for that region, stating what this is and *(b)* median male earnings for that region, stating what this is in both April 1979 and April 1990 and counting child benefit as negative taxation, for (i) the amount paid in income tax per week, (ii) the amount paid in national insurance contributions, (iii) the amount paid in VAT, (iv) the amount paid in indirect taxation, excise duties and so on (v) the amount paid in domestic rates or in community charge as appropriate and (vi) the total amount paid out in the listed categories above, giving in each case the figures in current prices, constant prices and as a percentage of gross earnings.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 11 February 1992]*: Figures for average male earnings in April 1979 and April 1990 and for median male earnings in April 1990 are shown in the table, along with the income tax and employee national insurance contributions payable on them under the 1979-80 and 1990-91 tax and NIC regimes respectively. Figures for regional median male earnings for 1979 are

unavailable and could be derived only at disproportionate cost. Reliable estimates of the amounts payable in VAT, other indirect taxes, domestic rates and the community charge which reflect regional variations in spending patterns and local tax rates cannot be made as the sample size of the family expenditure survey, on which such estimates would be based, is too small.

At regional mean male earnings

	England									*Wales*	*Scotland*
	Greater London	*Remainder of South East*	*East Anglia*	*South West*	*West Midlands*	*East Midlands*	*Yorkshire and Humberside*	*North West*	*North*		
£ per week at April 1979 prices											
April 1979											
Mean male earnings	113·40	99·90	93·80	90·90	96·80	95·70	97·70	97·80	98·30	96·50	99·30
Income tax	14·83	10·78	8·95	8·08	9·85	9·52	10·12	10·15	10·30	9·76	10·60
NICs	7·37	6·49	6·10	5·91	6·29	6·22	6·35	6·36	6·39	6·27	6·45
Total	22·20	17·27	15·04	13·99	16·14	15·74	16·47	16·50	16·69	16·03	17·05
£ per week at April 1990 prices											
April 1979											
Mean male earnings	261·33	230·22	216·16	209·48	223·07	220·54	225·15	225·38	226·53	222·38	228·83
Income tax	34·17	24·84	20·62	18·62	22·69	21·93	23·32	23·39	23·73	22·49	24·42
NICs	16·99	14·96	14·05	13·62	14·50	14·33	14·63	14·65	14·72	14·45	14·87
Total	51·16	39·80	34·67	32·23	37·19	36·27	37·95	38·04	38·46	36·94	39·30
April 1990											
Mean male earnings	383·10	310·60	281·10	277·30	269·30	269·70	266·90	274·70	265·20	258·60	276·40
Income tax	58·56	40·43	33·06	32·11	30·11	30·21	29·51	31·46	29·08	27·43	31·88
NICs	28·28	24·73	22·08	21·74	21·02	21·05	20·80	21·50	20·65	20·05	21·66
Total	86·84	65·17	55·14	55·84	51·12	51·26	50·31	52·96	49·73	47·49	53·54
Percentages of gross earnings											
April 1979											
Income tax (per cent.)	13·1	10·8	9·5	8·9	10·2	9·9	10·4	10·4	10·5	10·1	10·7
NICs (per cent.)	6·5	6·5	6·5	6·5	6·5	6·5	6·5	6·5	6·5	6·5	6·5
Total (per cent.)	19·6	17·3	16·0	15·4	16·7	16·4	16·9	16·9	17·0	16·6	17·2
April 1990											
Income tax (per cent.)	15·3	13·0	11·8	11·6	11·2	11·2	11·1	11·5	11·0	10·6	11·5
NICs (per cent.)	7·4	8·0	7·9	7·8	7·8	7·8	7·8	7·8	7·8	7·8	7·8
Total (per cent.)	22·7	21·0	19·6	19·4	19·0	19·0	18·8	19·3	18·8	18·4	19·4
April 1990											
£ per week at April 1990 prices											
Median male earnings	320·00	275·70	247·80	249·50	242·30	242·40	241·80	246·50	241·80	237·70	243·30
Income tax	42·78	31·71	24·73	25·16	23·36	23·38	23·23	24·41	23·23	22·21	23·61
NICs	25·58	21·59	19·08	19·24	18·59	18·60	18·54	18·97	18·54	18·17	18·68
Total	68·36	53·30	43·81	44·39	41·94	41·98	41·77	43·37	41·77	40·38	42·28
Percentages of gross earnings											
Income tax (per cent.)	13·4	11·5	10·0	10·1	9·6	9·6	9·6	9·9	9·5	9·3	9·7
NICs (per cent.)	8·0	7·8	7·7	7·7	7·7	7·7	7·7	7·7	7·7	7·6	7·7
Total (per cent.)	21·4	19·3	17·7	17·8	17·3	17·3	17·3	17·6	17·3	17·0	17·4

Notes to table:

(1) Income tax payments are calculated on the assumption that the households receive no tax reliefs other than the standard allowances and only have income from employment. All earners are assumed to pay Class 1 NI contributions at the contracted-in rate.

(2) Child benefit is treated as a negative income tax.

(3) Average and median earnings estimates are derived from the New Earnings Survey. To provide consistent estimates for the two years, average earnings figures for April 1979 have been multiplied by a splicing factor, taking account of a classification change in the 1983 New Earnings Survey, from 'males aged over 21 years' to 'all males on adult rates'. The regional average earnings shown for 1979 therefore differ from those in the published New Earnings Survey.

Student Taxpayers

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what, in the latest year for which information is available, is the number of students who pay income tax; and what is the total number of students who pay VAT.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 24 February 1992]:* Information on the number of students who pay income tax is not available centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

VAT is chargeable on a wide range of consumer expenditure and it is likely that everybody has to pay some in the course of a year.

Tobacco Taxation

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the amount of tax paid on the 10 most popular brands of cigarettes in each EC member state and the average price of a pack of 20 cigarettes in each country.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 26 February 1992]:* Information is available relating only to 1991 and for the most popular cigarette brand in each EC member states as follows:

Pence per 20

	Retail selling price	*Excise duty and VAT*
Spain	32	18
Greece	42	30
Portugal	60	45
Luxembourg	81	58
Italy	87	63
France	105	71
Netherlands	105	74
Belgium	113	82
Germany	146	107
Ireland	184	138
United Kingdom	208	155
Denmark	233	200

Taxes and Duties

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what amounts to taxes and duty were raised in each of the last five years *(a)* at 1991 prices and *(b)* as a percentage of total revenues on tobacco and tobacco products;

(2) what amounts of taxes and duties were raised in each of the last five years *(a)* at 1991 prices and *(b)* as a percentage of total revenues on alcohol and alcohol products.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 26 February 1992]:* The following is the information in respect of excise duty and VAT on alcoholic drink and tobacco at 1991 prices and as a percentage of total Customs and Excise receipts.

	Excise Duty and VAT £ million 1991 prices		*Percentage of Customs & Excise receipts*	
	Alcohol	*Tobacco*	*Alcohol*	*Tobacco*
1986-87	8,550	7,750	15·4	13·9
1987-88	8,600	7,500	14·8	12·9
1988-89	8,550	7,400	14·0	12·1
1989-90	8,000	6,950	13·5	11·7
1990-91	8,000	7,050	13·9	12·2

TRANSPORT

Redmire to Redcar Rail Link

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to intervene in the possible closure of the Redmire to Redcar rail link following the withdrawal of the British Steel limestone traffic; and what assessment he has made of the extent to which such a closure would be in accordance with his policy of transferring freight from road to rail.

Mr. Freeman: Following discussions with my Department, British Rail and my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) British Steel has agreed to continue transporting limestone on the Redmire line until the end of September, rather than the end of March as they had previously proposed. British Rail, for its part, has agreed to defer its proposed increase in rail charges for the same period. My officials are to host further discussions with my hon. Friend together with representatives of British Steel, British Rail and North Yorkshire county council, to explore the scope for keeping the limestone traffic on the line in the longer term. We have indicated our willingness to consider assistance through the freight facilities grants scheme, if appropriate.

Railway Clearing House

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department has any plans to lease the former railway clearing house building at Eversholt street, London NW1, following the privatisation of railway services.

Mr. McLoughlin: No. I understand from the British Rail property board that the former railway clearing house was vested in the assets of Sealink, which was sold by the British Railways Board in 1984.

Ports Act 1991

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to review the operations of part III of the Ports Act 1991 in so far as its effects upon lighthouse dues and the smaller ports are concerned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am currently considering proposals made by Trinity House and the Northern Lighthouse board under part III of the Ports Act 1991. In reaching a decision I shall take account of the representations made by the various interested parties.

Motorcycle Leg Protection

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will withdraw his proposals for the use of motorcycle leg protection.

Mr. Chope: It is the Government's desire to encourage the development of safe motorcycle secondary protection devices so that they can be available on an optional basis to those motorcyclists who wish to make use of them.

There remains considerable scepticism among manufacturers as to whether it is possible to design and produce motorcycle leg protectors which enhance total safety and do not increase the risk of head injuries. Research is therefore continuing with a view to allaying such concerns.

Roads and Traffic, Shropshire

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the capital and revenue contributions from central Government to road and traffic schemes in Shropshire for 1978-79, 1982-83, 1986-87 and 1991-92.

Mr. Chope: The capital allocations were as follows:

	1978-79	1982-83	1986-87	1991-92
		£ million		
Borrowing/credit approvals or equivalent	N/A	2,927	2,434	5,621
Transport supplementary grant	N/A	[1]	1,456	4,355
Total	—	—	3,890	9,976

[1] Before 1985-86 transport supplementary grant was paid on both capital and revenue expenditure but was not differentiated between the two elements.

Grants to local authorities for revenue expenditure have since 1982 been unhypothecated—that is, not split into allocations for separate services. Only the ceiling for expenditure by central Government is controlled. Shropshire county council is free to make as much or as little revenue expenditure as it considers appropriate on road and traffic schemes.

Euro-routes

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the designation of Euro-routes between Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

Mr. Chope: Euro-routes are designated in annex I of the European agreement on main international traffic arteries (AGR). This is a free-standing agreement managed by the Economic Commission for Europe of the United Nations in Geneva.

The E routes designated between Ireland and Britain are:

the E16 which runs Londonderry-Belfast-Glasgow-Edinburgh;

the E18 which runs Craigavon-Belfast-Larne-Stranraer-Gretna-Carlisle-Newcastle and then through Norway, Sweden and Finland to St. Petersburg;

the E20 which runs Shannon-Dublin-Liverpool-Manchester-Bradford-Leeds-Hull and then through Denmark, Sweden and Estonia to St. Petersburg;

the E30 which runs Cork-Rosslare-Fishguard-Cardiff-London-Felixstowe and then through the Netherlands, Germany, Poland and Byelorussia to Moscow.

Road Schemes

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to announce the detailed guidelines for the use of discretionary powers to acquire property affected by his Department's road schemes which were referred to in his answer to the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) of 21 November, 1991 *Official Report*, column 237.

Mr. Chope: I announced the detailed guidelines for the use of the new discretionary powers of section 62 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 on 17 January, pursuant to my answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley).

Sir Peter Blaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in the *Official Report* for each highway authority *(a)* the value of the first year return, *(b)* the total net present value and *(c)* the length of each road project which qualified for transport supplementary grant in each year from 1989-90 to 1991-92; and if he will give the same information for each road project which has been accepted for transport supplementary grant in 1992-93 and for the proposed Squires Gate link road, phase 2, in Lancashire.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 24 February 1992]:* Listed are the details requested for major schemes newly accepted for transport supplementary grant in the years 1989-90 to 1992-93. The tables also include similar information on the Squires Gate link road phase II.

Schemes newly accepted for Transport Supplementary Grant in 1989-90

n/s: Data not supplied by local highway authority

Authority	*Scheme*	*First year rate of return (per cent.)*	*Total net present value (£ million)*	*Length of scheme (kilometres)*	*Duration of scheme (months)*
Bexley	Bexleyheath Southern Relief Road	21	n/s	0·4	9
Enfield	Nags Head Road/High Street, Ponders End, Junction Improvement	9	n/s	n/s	21
Waltham Forest	Bakers Arms Junction Improvement	10	n/s	0·2	31
Bolton	Market Street Diversion Westhoughton	9	0·6	1·0	12
Manchester	Manchester/Salford IRR (A6/Mancunian Way)	14	3·7	0·7	24
Salford	Crescent Bridge Reconstruction	99	5·3	0·3	12
Salford	Irlam/Cadishead Bypass (Boysnope Wharf-Brinell Drive)	12	4·6	4·0	18
Trafford	City Link	n/s	n/s	1·4	18
Liverpool	Park Road Relief Road Phase 2	n/s	n/s	n/s	18
St. Helens	St. Helens Town Centre to M62 Link Road [C] (Exc. Con.)	9	4·2	7·6	30
Barnsley	East of Hoyland Swaine	10	0·3	1·8	12
Rotherham	A630/A631 Rotherham to M1 Link	32	8·5	2·6	38
Sheffield	(pt. 4350) Sheffield-M1 via Mosborough Stage II and III	n/s	1·9	5·6	42
Newcastle upon Tyne	(3435, 4486 and 4488) West Central Route	n/s	n/s	1·4	36
South Tyneside	Newcastle Road, South Shields	15	1·5	1·0	15
Birmingham	City UTC	88	n/s	n/s	24
Birmingham	Middle Ring Road (Key Hill Link)	20	n/s	0·7	18
Birmingham	Middle Ring Road (New John Street West)	20	n/s	1·3	18
Birmingham	Washwood Heath Road/High Street Junction	99	n/s	0·4	9
Wolverhampton	Willenhall Road Improvement (Deans Road-Neachells Lane)	n/s	n/s	0·5	54

Authority	Scheme	First year rate of return (per cent.)	Total net present value (£ million)	Length of scheme (kilometres)	Duration of scheme (months)
Avon	(pt. 4096) Avon R.R. IB2: Westerleigh Road-Shortwood Road	14	26·1	2·3	18
Avon	Urban Traffic Control	80	3·5	n/s	30
Berkshire	Reading Urban Traffic Control	n/s	n/s	n/s	14
Buckinghamshire	Wing-Milton Keynes Fenny Stratford BP (MKDC Con.)[C]	n/s	3·7	2·2	18
Cambridgeshire	Elton/Chesterton BP (Excl. PDC Contribution) [C]	n/s	5·0	5·9	18
Cheshire	Diversion (Phase 2) Warrington	8	0·5	1·2	24
Cleveland	(pt. 1024) Guisborough Road Improvement	6	0·4	1·0	12
Cornwall	(1368) Sticker Bypass	8	0·4	3·0	18
Cumbria	Papcastle Diversion	21	3·3	2·0	24
Cumbria	Romney Road Link [C] (Excl. Developer's Contribution)	61	3·3	0·3	18
Devon	UTC/Scoot Phase 3	n/s	n/s	n/s	60
Durham	Wheatley Hill Bypass	13	2·0	3·5	30
East Sussex	Brighton Bypass-Hangleton Link [C] (Excl. DTP Contribution)	n/s	n/s	1·7	24
Essex	Little Waltham to Great Leighs Stages 1 and 2	n/s	n/s	1·6	13
Hampshire	West Totton Bypass (2)	15	10·5	1·2	24
Humberside	Hull Ennerdale Link	53	18·1	3·3	39
Humberside	Humber Bridge Northern Approach Road	12	3·3	5·3	21
Kent	Eastry Bypass	14	0·6	2·5	20
Kent	Maidstone Spine Road	46	30·4	2·7	42
Kent	Somerhill Park Link Tonbridge	17	1·9	2·3	26
Kent	South Ashford to Hamstreet	7	−0·1	6·2	27
Kent	Stockbridge to Brenzett	7	0·1	4·0	18
Kent	Sturry Road to Military Road Link Canterbury	32	1·1	0·2	12
Kent	Whitfield Bypass	11	0·4	2·1	17
Kent	Whitfield to Eastry	8	0·3	7·5	24
Lancashire	(RN) Penwortham Bypass Extension to Preston	14	9·8	1·2	19
Lancashire	Accrington Town Centre Relief Road	45	3·4	0·7	12
Lancashire	Freckleton Bypass	21	5·7	3·3	15
Lancashire	Kirkham and Wesham Bypass	16	2·7	1·9	18
Lancashire	Lancaster/Morecambe Bypass (Phase I)	81	8·3	5·8	24
Leicestershire	Syston Northern Bypass	6	0·5	2·3	16
Lincolnshire	Wainfleet bypass	20	1·4	3·8	20
Norfolk	Dersingham/Snettisham Bypass	n/s	7·7	5·8	18
Northamptonshire	Staverton Bypass	n/s	0·1	1·2	5
Nottinghamshire	Hucknall Bypass	n/s	4·5	5·4	55
Nottinghamshire	Portland Street to Inner Ring Road Mansfield	99	n/s	0·5	10
Shropshire	Whitchurch Bypass	n/s	0·2	2·1	24
Staffordshire	Hawkins Lane Link Burton-upon-Trent	22	1·0	0·5	15
Suffolk	Long Melford Bypass	9	1·5	5·4	18
Surrey	Ewell Bypass	26	3·9	1·6	18
West Sussex	Rustington Bypass	9	2·1	3·0	24

Schemes newly accepted for Transport Supplementary Grant in 1990-91

n/s: Data not supplied by local highway authority

Authority	Scheme	First year rate of return (per cent.)	Total net present value (£ million)	Length of scheme (kilometres)	Duration of scheme (months)
Croydon	Mitcham Road/Sumner Road Junction Improvement	19	1·0	n/s	17
Ealing	South Road Pedestrianisation (Southall TN Centre)	n/s	1·6	0·1	21
Merton	(RN) Beddington/Mitcham Relief Road	61	59·8	3·3	32
Wandsworth	Battersea Park Road (Alexandra Avenue-Queenstown Road)	16	n/s	0·6	21
Bolton	Outer Ring Road Improvements	176	20·5	10·6	60
Manchester	Airport Access Roads Stage 2 (M56 Spur/ Airport)	66	1·8	0·6	14
Manchester	Intermediate Ring Road Stage 2 (Pottery Lane-Oldham Road)	17	6·8	3·1	36
Manchester	Intermediate Ring Road Stage 1 (Kirkmanshulme Lane-Pottery Lane)	51	11·6	1·4	20
Stockport	(5283) Brinksway Improvement Phase 2	12	4·2	0·6	19
Wigan	Lowton St. Mary's Bypass	14	2·6	1·4	18
Knowsley	(RN) M57-A562 Link Road	8	20·6	4·5	30
Liverpool	Great Howard Street Improvement Phase 1	n/s	n/s	0·8	18

Authority	Scheme	First year rate of return (per cent.)	Total net present value (£ million)	Length of scheme (kilometres)	Duration of scheme (months)
Sheffield	(0353) Outer Ring Road Darnall Stage II, III and IV	5	0·2	2·6	51
Sheffield	(5475 and 5476) Penistone Road Stages II and III	28	4·8	2·5	36
Sunderland	Eastern Relief Road	n/s	7·6	0·8	30
Birmingham	(5691) UDA Spine Road (Heartlands)	n/s	n/s	4·1	43
Birmingham	Lichfield Road Improvement Phase 1 (UDA Scheme)	52	66·2	1·2	42
Birmingham	Middle Ring Road (Lawley Street Viaduct Section)	53	4·4	0·5	18
Coventry	North-South Road Phase 1	37	28·4	2·4	18
Dudley	Dudley Southern Bypass	15	59·3	3·1	66
Solihull	(5404) Shirley Junction Improvements Phase 1	24	3·2	0·8	14
Bradford	(5031) Bradford City Ring Road Stage II	23	71·9	1·2	24
Bradford	Killinghall Triangle	182	30·5	0·4	8
Leeds	Leeds Inner Ring Road Stages 6 and 7	n/s	n/s	2·2	24
Avon	(5657) Western Super Mare PDR Stages VA and VB	11	3·9	1·4	24
Avon	Avon Ring Road (IV): Marsham Way-A4 Bath Road	19	6·4	2·8	30
Bedfordshire	Stagsden Bypass	n/s	1·2	3·0	12
Berkshire	Sandhurst Crowthorne Bypass	n/s	27·9	3·8	18
Berkshire	Slough Bath Road Montem Lane-Wellington Street	n/s	11·1	0·6	18
Cambridgeshire	A14/A603/B1042 Junction Improvement Arrington	13	n/s	1·0	6
Cheshire	Wilmslow Local Bypass	n/s	n/s	3·0	30
Cleveland	(1026) Thornaby Bypass	22	18·8	5·0	87
Cornwall	Liskeard Industrial Distributor Road	2	5·6	1·5	13
Devon	Milehouse Junction Improvement Plymouth	79	28·6	0·4	12
Devon	Thorns Cross to Eagle Farm Stage 4	15	6·8	2·8	12
Devon	Torbay Ring Road Stage 2	62	34·8	2·7	12
Devon	Western Approach/Union Street Junction Improvement Plymouth	91	34·2	0·8	9
Dorset	(pt5740) Primary Network/A37 Improvement-Section A AIP	7	0·1	2·8	8
Durham	Consett Bypass Stage II	n/s	n/s	1·8	18
Durham	Metal Bridge to Bowburn	9	3·5	1·8	12
East Sussex	Boarshead to Eridge	14	10·0	3·9	24
Essex	Canes Lane Improvement (Final Stage)	n/s	1·8	1·7	18
Essex	Dovercourt Bypass Stage 2 Phase 2	n/s	2·9	2·5	24
Hampshire	M3 Link Minley	49	45·7	1·0	20
Hereford and Worcester	A44-A422 Link Worcester Road-Whittington Road Marl Bank	27	71·3	1·0	12
Hereford and Worcester	Roman Road Hereford Phase 4 Stage 2	4	−0·3	1·5	6
Kent	Dartford Northern Bypass	43	68·3	3·0	24
Kent	Thames-Side Industrial Route (TIR) Stage 1	56	21·3	2·4	24
Lancashire	Blackburn Inner Relief Road (Phase 1)	30	13·9	0·9	16
Lancashire	Park Road/St. Helens Road Link Ormskirk	17	7·6	0·4	9
Lancashire	Squires Gate Lane Blackpool Dualling	19	6·4	1·4	12
Leicestershire	Ashby-Loughborough Coleorton Improvement	12	0·2	1·9	10
Leicestershire	Redland Quarry to Quorn/Mountsorrel Bypass Link	n/s	0·3	1·1	n/s
Norfolk	Watton Inner Relief Road	n/s	5·9	0·5	9
Northamptonshire	Middleton Cheney BP and Overthorpe Hall Improvement	n/s	13·8	3·2	17
Northamptonshire	Nene Valley Way I Crawler Lane	n/s	1·4	1·2	6
Northamptonshire	River Tove Bends	n/s	2·7	1·1	14
Northumberland	Prudhoe Northern Bypass	n/s	23·2	4·4	30
Northumberland	Swinburne Quarry to Fourlaws Stage 1	n/s	1·3	2·0	18
North Yorkshire	Sherburn-in-Elmet and South Milford Bypass	n/s	7·4	6·8	24
Nottinghamshire	Manvers Street Link Nottingham	n/s	3·8	1·8	57
Oxfordshire	(RN) Banbury Inner Relief Road	23	37·4	2·0	24
Shropshire	Ironbridge Bypass Extension	24	3·7	2·8	12
Somerset	Lysander Road to Hendford Yeovil	n/s	n/s	0·7	9
Staffordshire	Burslem Town Centre Bypass	2	0·5	0·5	15
Suffolk	Mutford Bridge	12	0·5	0·5	18
Suffolk	Stowmarket Relief Road	10	10·1	1·6	18
West Sussex	Crawley South Western Bypass	n/s	15·1	2·3	n/s
West Sussex	Littlehampton Bypass (Main Scheme)	n/s	24·7	1·8	n/s
Wiltshire	Burbage Bypass	13	2·6	2·6	24
Wiltshire	Swindon Cricklade Road Relief Road-Stage 2	n/s	n/s	1·2	14

Schemes newly accepted for Transport Supplementary Grant in 1991-92

n/s: Data not supplied by local highway authority

Authority	*Scheme*	*First year rate of return (per cent.)*	*Total net present value (£ million)*	*Length of scheme (kilometres)*	*Duration of scheme (months)*
Barking and Dagenham	Beacontree Heath Road Improvements	n/s	n/s	0·3	24
Bromley	Elmers End Road Railway Bridge	25	2·8	0·2	16
Ealing	Iron Bridge Highway Improvement	92	21·2	0·3	15
Hillingdon	Uxbridge Town Centre Improvement Scheme	44	34·6	1·0	29
Stockport	A34 Bypass (Etchells Road to Schools Hill)	n/s	1·1	1·1	30
Newcastle upon Tyne	Scotswood Road Phase 1	n/s	n/s	n/s	11
Berkshire	Phase 2 A33 Relief Road Rose Kiln Lane to I.D.R.	n/s	n/s	1·2	24
Buckinghamshire	A509/A422 Newport Pagnall BP Dualling (MKDC Con.)	n/s	8·6	4·2	12
Cheshire	Handforth BP and MAELR (Stockport/ Developer Funded)	31	93·1	11·2	24
Cheshire	Urban Traffic Control System (Chester Warrington)	n/s	n/s	n/s	48
Cleveland	Portrack Lane Dualling	38	19·6	0·9	45
Cornwall	Penryn and Falmouth Distributor Road	13	9·5	3·8	25
Cumbria	Rothay Link	10	1·3	0·7	20
Devon	A380 Relief Road (Kerswell to Hele Road)	70	15·9	1·6	24
Devon	Halcyon Road Newton Abbot Town Centre	103	34·5	0·4	12
Dorset	West Stafford Bypass	9	0·9	3·0	15
Durham	Darlington Cross Town Route Stage I	n/s	n/s	1·9	24
Durham	Teesside Link and Airport Access	14	10·0	5·4	24
East Sussex	East Hoathly Bypass	38	11·5	1·8	12
Essex	Stanford-le-Hope to Five Bells Stage 2	n/s	110·5	3·5	24
Gloucestershire	Eastington-Stroud Stage 2 (Stonehouse Court-Horsetrough Junction)	n/s	n/s	1·1	45
Hampshire	Totton Western Bypass (Stage 3)	22	43·6	2·6	n/s
Hereford and Worcester	Alvechurch Bypass	45	17·1	3·0	19
Humberside	Leven Bypass	16	5·2	4·3	24
Kent	Roydon Hall Bends to A26	22	3·5	1·5	12
Leicestershire	Hinckley Northern Perimeter Completion	40	7·9	3·1	25
Lincolnshire	Grantham Inner Relief Road	n/s	1·7	0·7	11
Norfolk	King's Lynn Traffic Management Scheme	n/s	n/s	n/s	22
Norfolk	Stratton Strawless-Hevingham Improvement	n/s	1·6	4·2	4
Northamptonshire	Brackley Southern Bypass	28	10·9	n/s	12
North Yorkshire	Ripon BP/Distributor Roads and Works in City Centre	16	17·7	3·5	24
Shropshire	Newport Bypass	13	5·4	3·0	16
Somerset	Shepton Mallet to East of Dean	6	1·6	7·6	36
Staffordshire	Keele Bypass	14	2·1	1·8	11
West Sussex	Hooklands Improvement	n/s	9·4	2·0	24
Wiltshire	Trowbridge Relief Road Stage 2	n/s	n/s	0·6	12

Schemes newly accepted for Transport Supplementary Grant in 1992-93

n/s: Data not supplied by local highway authority

Authority	*Scheme*	*First year rate of return (per cent.)*	*Total net present value (£ million)*	*Length of scheme (kilometres)*	*Duration of scheme (months)*
Hackney	Lea Bridge Road ES-Renewal of Bridge Deck	n/s	n/s	0·5	42
Waltham Forest	Lea Bridge Reconstruction-Cont. to Hackney	n/s	n/s	0·1	30
Wirral	New Chester Road Improvement (MDC Cont.)	11	2·8	1·0	12
Barnsley	Dearne Towns Link Road	12	31·6	12·4	57
Sheffield	A61 Sheffield Parkway/Park Square Junction Improvement	198	10·7	0·3	10
Gateshead	Western Riverside Route ST1 PH2 and ST2	n/s	n/s	0·9	18
Newcastle upon Tyne	Scotswood Road Impt.—West of Paradise	n/s	8·9	0·9	9
Sunderland	Doxford Park Access Road Stage 2 (Bypass)	n/s	4·4	0·5	7
Birmingham	Thimble Mill Lane (UDA Scheme) Phase 2	79	11·1	0·8	8
Dudley	High Street Amblecote	104	31·5	0·7	13
Solihull	West Midlands Renaissance Area	6	16·8	4·8	72
Kirklees	Huddersfield Ring Road IMP PH 2	n/s	20·3	11·9	6
Avon	Avonmouth Link	n/s	n/s	0·5	24
Buckinghamshire	Bletchley Road Diversion Buckingham (MKDC Con.)	17	2·6	1·8	12
Cambridgeshire	Spittals Link Huntingdon	61	15·9	0·8	14
Cheshire	Upton (Chester) Park and Ride	n/s	n/s	0·4	12
Cleveland	Guisborough Bypass	28	24·5	1·9	23
Cornwall	Egloshayle Bypass	n/s	n/s	1·5	9
Devon	Tavistock Road Dualling Stage 1 Plymouth	32	7·9	0·9	12

Authority	Scheme	First year rate of return (per cent.)	Total net present value (£ million)	Length of scheme (kilometres)	Duration of scheme (months)
Dorset	A37 IMP SEC B&C A356-Somerset Boundary	n/s	n/s	12·4	48
Durham	Newton Cap Diversion	17	10·5	1·8	24
East Sussex	A26 Malling Hill (Local Traffic) Rel. Road Lewes	13	1·8	0·4	30
Essex	Aukingford Gardens-Talbot Roundabout ST 1 & 2	8	2·7	4·5	24
Gloucestershire	Lydney Highway Strategy-Part 1 (Bypass)	9	4·2	4·8	48
Hampshire	Bentley Bypass	11	18·2	2·3	18
Humberside	Beverley North East Bypass	n/s	n/s	2·5	12
Kent	Ash Bypass	12	4·5	5·5	16
Kent	Medway Tunnel	38	172·1	15·0	38
Lancashire	Chorley Town Centre Bypass Phase III	34	13·4	0·7	20
Leicestershire	Leicester Motorways Employment Area STIV Soar Valley Way	41	17·4	1·7	12
Lincolnshire	Swallow Bypass and Route Improvement	19	5·2	3·6	12
Norfolk	Kirstead Bypass	n/s	0·1	1·8	9
Northamptonshire	Deanshanger Bypass	15	3·1	1·5	10
North Yorkshire	A59 Bolton Bridge Bypass	8	0·9	2·1	12
Oxfordshire	Wallingford Bypass	8	4·6	4·4	24
Somerset	Glastonbury Western Relief Road	17	11·0	3·7	25
West Sussex	Chichester and Bognor Regis Improvement (Phase 1)	n/s	6·0	1·7	15
Wiltshire	The Meads Roundabout Swindon Grade Separation	9	n/s	0·8	19
For comparison the following information was provided for 1992-93:					
Lancashire	Squires Gate Link Road Phase II	29	24·0	2·1	18

Helicopters, Central London

Ms. Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the terms of reference of the study he has initiated on helicopter provision for central London; and if he will include in them an assessment of the need and of the demand for helicopter provision in central London.

Mr. McLoughlin: The group undertaking the study will make a comparative evaluation of possible sites for a heliport to serve central London, and submit a report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The study will include an assessment of the need and the demand for helicopter services in central London. It will also consider safety and other operational factors, air traffic control constraints, noise and other environmental issues, and surface access. My right hon. Friend intends to publish the group's report, which he hopes to receive within 12 months.

ENVIRONMENT

Buildings in Scotland

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what funds his Department has spent on buildings in Scotland in each of the past five years; and if he will list the amount spent on each project.

Mr. Yeo: The figures are as follows:

	£ million
1986-87	133·501
1987-88	115·389
1988-89	110·701
1989-90	130·856
1990-91	12·323

The figures for the years 1986-87 to 1989-90 represent expenditure by PSA Scotland. Since 1 April 1988 clients have progressively untied from PSA services and become responsible for reporting expenditure against their own votes. Therefore:

(1) expenditure from 1 April 1988 excludes major schemes for Civil clients.

(2) expenditure in 1990-91 represents that by the Property Holdings directorate of DoE on civil accommodation in Scotland, but excludes expenditure by other civil departments and MOD.

Major construction schemes controlled by PSA headquarters are excluded as expenditure records are not maintained on a location basis. The figures also exclude rental costs.

It is not possible to provide details of the amounts spent on each project.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in his Department in each of grades (i) 1, (ii) 2, (iii) 3, (iv) 4, (v) 5, (vi) 6, (vii) 7, (viii) SEO, (ix) HEO, (x) administrative trainee, (xi) EO, (xii) CO and (xiii) CA.

Mr. Heseltine: The numbers of women and men at each grade level (including equivalent grades) in the Department of the Environment on 1 January 1992 were:

	Female	Male
Grade 1	0	1
Grade 2	2	6
Grade 3	5	31
Grade 4	0	9
Grade 5	21	126
Grade 6	20	259
Grade 7	118	658
SEO and equivalent	119	560
HEO and equivalent	298	641
EO and equivalent	544	697
AT	6	4
AO and equivalent	946	668

	Female	Male
AA and equivalent	627	363
Total (6,729)	2,704	4,025

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total number of employees in his Department; and how many are *(a)* black and *(b)* disabled.

Mr. Heseltine: The Department of the Environment had 6,729 non-industrial employees on 1 January 1992; 5,066 are white, 456 are of ethnic minority origin, and 1,207 have not yet revealed their ethnic origin.

The Department employs 73 staff who are registered disabled and a further 58 who are known to have a disability but are not registered.

RECHAR

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the granting of RECHAR to local authorities will carry with it supplementary credit approval.

Mr. Yeo: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 17 February 1992, *Official Report*, column 22, in respect of the ERDF-aided RECHAR programme.

Energy Saver Scheme

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider introducing grants for local authorities as part of an energy saver scheme.

Mr. Baldry: The Government are promoting energy efficiency-related schemes in local authority housing through the green house demonstration programme, the home energy efficiency scheme and through estate action schemes which can include improvements to the heating and insulation of local authority housing.

Housing, London

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the numbers of households in (i) owner occupation, (ii) private renting, (iii) local authority renting, (iv) housing association renting and (v) other for *(a)* each London borough, *(b)* Greater London, *(c)* outer London, *(d)* inner London and *(e)* England as a whole for each year from 1980-81 to 1991-92.

Mr. Yeo: Available estimates from household surveys are as follows:

Thousands of households

	Owner occupiers	Renters			All
		Local authority	Housing association	Private landlord	
England					
1981	9,600	5,500	300	2,000	17,300
1982	10,000	5,100	300	2,000	17,400
1983	10,500	5,100	400	1,700	17,600
1984	10,800	4,700	400	1,800	17,800
1985	11,300	4,600	400	1,700	18,000
1986	11,700	4,400	400	1,700	18,100
1987	12,000	4,200	500	1,600	18,300
1988	12,000	4,400	500	1,600	18,500
1989	12,500	4,200	500	1,500	18,700
1990	12,600	4,100	500	1,600	18,800
Greater London					
1981	1,250	790	110	440	2,600
1984	1,390	790	120	400	2,700
1988	1,520	730	150	350	2,750
Outer London					
1981	980	350	40	200	1,580
1984	1,100	330	40	180	1,660
1988	1,150	320	50	180	1,690
Inner London					
1981	270	440	70	240	1,020
1984	300	460	70	220	1,050
1988	380	420	100	170	1,060

Notes
Estimates are derived from sample surveys and therefore subject to the usual sampling errors.
England—proportions from the general household survey applied to the Department of the Environment's household estimates.
London—regional and sub-regional estimates require a larger sample which is only available for the years shown—from the labour force survey housing trailers. Figures for inner and outer London may not sum to the totals for Greater London because of rounding.

Information on the number of households by tenure for individual local authorities is available only from the census of population. Until 1991 census results are available, in early summer 1992, the most recent information is from the 1981 census. Copies of 1981 census reports are in the Library.

Air Pollution

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations have been received by his Department to date concerning the report,

"Air Pollution and Tree Health in the UK;" and if he will make a statement on the progress made in the light of its recommendations.

Mr. Baldry: None. The report is due for publication in the spring.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to review the targets for his Department's plan for reducing sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions from existing large combustion plants.

Mr. Baldry: I have no immediate plans to review the emission limits set out in the national plan.

New Homes

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated average first year cost of constructing a new home *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in each standard economic region; and if he will provide this information according to the available data on different sites of home.

Sir George Young: The majority of new housebuilding is undertaken by private builders and consequently the information requested is not available to the Department.

Bed-and-breakfast Accommodation

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average annual cost of keeping a family in bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Sir George Young: Annual costs can be derived from the information published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy in "Homelessness Statistics: 1989-90 Actuals", a copy of which is in the Library.

Government Contributions, Shropshire

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the capital and revenue contributions from central Government to Shropshire county council and Shrewsbury and Atcham borough council for 1978-79, 1982-83, 1986-87 and 1991-92.

Mr. Key: The following is the information:

Central Government contributions

	Shropshire county council £ million	*Shrewsbury and Atcham borough council £ million*
1978-79 Revenue:		
Rate support grant[1]	27·550	4·108
Relevant specific grants to revenue	n.a.	n.a.
Rate rebate grant	0·0	0·190
Transport supplementary grant to revenue	0·490	0·0
Total Revenue	n.a.	n.a.
Capital	n.a.	n.a.
1982-83 Revenue:		
Rate support grant[2]	64·734	2·518
Relevant specific grants to revenue	8·554	0·358
Rate rebate grant	0·0	0·731
Transport supplementary grant to revenue	0·913	0·0
Total Revenue	74·201	3·607
Capital	n.a.	n.a.
1986-87 Revenue:		
Rate support grant[2]	74·597	2·761
Relevant specific grants to revenue	12·859	0·884
Rate rebate grant	0·0	1·826
Transport supplementary grant to revenue	0·037	0·0
Total Revenue	88·393	5·471
Capital	0·868	0·051
1991-92[3] Revenue grants:		
To Collection fund		
Revenue support grant	0·0	11·074
Special grants	0·0	0·0
Community charge grant	0·0	9·550
To General fund		
Specific grants inside AEF	20·202	0·151
Other revenue support:		
NNDR entitlement (to Collection fund)	0·0	24·467
Total Revenue support inside AEF	20·202	47·579
Capital	7·751	0·750

[1] In 1978-79, rate support grant was made up of needs, resources and domestic elements. The needs element was paid to county councils and resources and domestic elements were paid to district councils.

[2] In 1981-82, following the introduction of a different rate support grant system, needs and resources elements were replaced by block grant payable to both upper and lower tier authorities.

[3] In 1990-91 the community charge system was introduced. The figures include all grants into the collection fund administered by Shrewsbury and Atcham borough council, which supports the chargepayer in respect of spending by all tiers of authorities. The Government also pay specific grants into the general funds administered by both the named authorities. The figures given are estimates of those inside aggregate Exchequer finance (AEF). As the two authorities do not cover the same functions, the specific grants are quite different both in size and consumption.

Leeds Development Council

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 24 February, if he will set out, for each year since the establishment of the Leeds development corporation, the figures provided by the economic consultants; and if he will place in the Library a copy of each report prepared by the economic consultants.

Mr. Key: The net gain in employment figures provided by the economic consultants for each year since the establishment of Leeds development corporation is as follows:

	Number
1988-89	2,007
1989-90	3,234
1990-91	621

The reports prepared by the consultants contain information which is commercial-in-confidence. If the hon. Member wishes to discuss the details further he should contact the chairman of the development corporation direct.

Thorn and Hatfield Moors

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received concerning the future of Thorne and Hatfield moors; and how many of these were in favour of the agreement between English Nature and Fisons plc.

Mr. Heseltine: Since the details of the agreement between English Nature and Fisons were made public I have received only a few letters which express some reservations or seek further clarification of its contents. As knowledge of the agreement becomes more general I am sure that the public will recognise that the agreement is a significant step forward in the safeguarding of peatlands.

Peat

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will place in the Library copies of the research commissioned by English Nature from the Institute of Hydrology and Dundee university into the hydrology of peat bogs;

(2) if he will publish any assessment made by English Nature of the effects of continual commercial peat cutting on Thorne and Hatfield moors adjacent to those areas now identified for conservation purposes and any hydrological or other research on which such assessment has been based.

Mr. Heseltine: The research commissioned by English Nature from the Institute of Hydrology and the University of Dundee concerning the hydrology of part of Thorne moors has just been published. A copy will be placed in the Library.

In addition a study carried out by the University of Sheffield identified a need to retain water on the national nature reserve on Thorne moors and to block the drains running from the surrounding land. This will be done under the terms of the agreement reached between English Nature and Fisons.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if English Nature intends to remove site of special scientific interest status from any area of peat bog from which peat is commercially extracted.

Mr. Heseltine: No.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library a copy of the agreement between Fisons plc and English Nature concerning peat extraction.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) on 12 February 1992, *Official Report*, column *506*. In addition I have arranged for a copy of the information package made available to the public by English Nature at the time of the announcement of the agreement to be placed in the Library.

Nature Conservation

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the draft planning policy guidance note on nature conservation will be published.

Sir George Young: The Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office have today published a draft planning policy guidance note on nature conservation for public consultation and copies are being placed in the Library. The planning policy guidance provides up-to-date guidance on how the Government's policies on the conservation of our natural heritage are to be reflected in land use planning. It also sets out the main statutory obligations under both domestic and international law. We want to ensure effective conservation of wildlife and natural features while making adequate provision for development and economic growth. This planning policy guidance is designed to achieve that.

Wild Birds

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he proposes to take to protect wild birds in trade.

Mr. Baldry: With colleagues in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, we are acting on a number of fronts to protect birds and other wild animals in trade.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, wrote last week to the European Commission to urge it to make speedy progress in drawing up the special safeguards for the transport of birds, negotiated last autumn by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, as part of a directive on the welfare of all animals in transport. To achieve immediate improvements in the conditions in which birds are transported. I am also writing, with my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Agriculture, to the International Air Traffic Association (IATA) to seek worldwide limits on the size of shipments. Should this approach fail, MAFF will introduce stricter limits nationally.

The Department has a particular responsibility for those birds and other animals whose import we licence. In preparation for next month's conference of the parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) I have identified with interested organisations, the introduction of checklists to monitor and enforce transport conditions as a top priority. The United Kingdom will complete these forthwith for imports of all animals subject to CITES controls. Checklists may be used as a basis for enforcement action; the application of stricter transport conditions; and for imposing restrictions on trade in particular species between particular countries. At the CITES conference, we shall urge others to follow our example on both the checklist and the collection of mortality statistics.

We shall also press for a substantial improvement in the implementation of CITES controls worldwide. In particular, as identified by our scientific advisers last year, action must be taken to remedy the failure of many countries to meet the Convention's requirements for the issue of export permits.

Our national licensing controls are already much more extensive than the basic CITES restrictions and we shall investigate further extension in the light of the latest

mortality statistics. We shall also continue to encourage our partners in the European Community to join us in imposing tighter controls. I welcome the recent publication by the European Commission of proposals for a regulation which would meet many of the wide-ranging concerns I expressed to them last year. We shall examine the full implications of the proposals urgently starting with those relating to the care and housing of live animals. Where appropriate, we shall not hesitate to take action before the regulation comes into effect.

Hedgerows

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to introduce grants for hedgerow maintenance.

Mr. Heseltine *[pursuant to his reply, 20 November 1991, c. 159]:* As part of our initiative "Action for the Countryside" which, together with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I launched today, we are introducing a new hedgerow incentive scheme to counter the problem of loss of hedgerows through lack of maintenance. The scheme will encourage farmers and landowners to manage hedgerows in ways that will ensure their long-term survival. The hedgerow incentive scheme will target hedgerows of particular historic, landscape or wildlife importance. Hedgerows are also being lost through removal and we have announced our intention to legislate when parliamentary time permits to introduce a hedgerow notification scheme.

In addition to our proposed new hedgerow incentive scheme, "Action for the Countryside" reviews other countryside policies, looks at the changes under way and sets out new initiatives for the future.

The new initiatives concentrate on action to maintain a prosperous economy and thriving communities in the countryside, to protect and enhance the landscape, to provide for public enjoyment of the countryside and to protect and conserve wildlife. They are not put forward in isolation. The initiatives described here carry forward the principles of "This Common Inheritance" (Cmd 1200) and are complementary to policies already in hand. They demonstrate the importance that the Government attach to integrating development to sustain rural communities with the conservation of the countryside.

The Government remain committed to keeping its policies in the countryside under review and will take further action when and where necessary to secure the delivery of its objectives.

I am arranging for copies of "Action for the Countryside" to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Education Expenditure

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for each local education authority the percentage increase in standard spending assessment for education comparing 1992-93 with 1991-92; how much of this variation was accounted for by variation in pupil numbers; how much was to meet the full year effects of the 1991 teachers pay award; and how much was for the anticipated effect of the 1992 pay award.

Mr. Key: The table shows for each authority the total percentage increase in the education standard spending assessment between 1991-92 and 1992-93 and the percentage increase accounted for by the changes in pupil numbers.

The overall cost of teachers' pay awards is among the pressures which the Government have taken into account in determining the appropriate amount for authorities to spend collectively on education in 1992-93. The cost of the pay awards is not, however, one of the indicators used to calculate education standard spending assessments and it is not therefore possible to identify a separate allowance for this cost within individual authorities' standard spending assessments.

Education authorities are to receive additional grant of £56·6 million in 1992-93 to fund the additional cost of the teachers' pay award. This will be distributed in line with the schools' elements of the education standard spending assessment.

Comparison of 1991-92 and 1992-93 education services standard spending assessments for each local education authority in England showing overall percentage changes and the percentage change attributable to updating pupil numbers

Local authority	*Percentage change 1991-92 to 1992-93 education standard spending assessment* per cent.	*Percentage change attributable to pupil numbers* per cent.
Total England	7·1	—
Total Shire counties	6·9	−0·2
Total Metropolitan districts	6·4	0·0
Total inner London boroughs including City	9·8	1·2
Total outer London boroughs	8·2	0·7
Total London boroughs	8·8	0·9
Total Shire areas	6·9	−0·2
Total Metropolitan areas	6·4	0·0
Total London	8·8	0·9
Isles of Scilly	19·6	10·1
Greater London		
City of London	−20·0	−29·5

Local authority	*Percentage change 1991-92 to 1992-93 education standard spending assessment* per cent.	*Percentage change attributable to pupil numbers* per cent.
Camden	6·3	−0·9
Greenwich	9·6	2·4
Hackney	9·9	1·0
Hammersmith and Fulham	11·9	4·6
Islington	12·9	3·2
Kensington and Chelsea	10·0	4·5
Lambeth	11·7	1·8
Lewisham	11·4	0·8
Southwark	9·4	1·5
Tower Hamlets	10·3	0·5
Wandsworth	3·3	−3·6
Westminster	11·8	2·1
Barking and Dagenham	8·2	1·1
Barnet	8·8	0·1
Bexley	7·5	0·5
Brent	7·5	0·3
Bromley	5·9	−0·8
Croydon	7·5	−0·9
Ealing	9·1	0·4
Enfield	7·7	0·3
Haringey	10·8	2·9
Harrow	6·0	0·1
Havering	5·5	−0·7
Hillingdon	6·7	0·1
Hounslow	9·5	1·8
Kingston upon Thames	6·7	−0·5
Merton	8·4	0·3
Newham	12·8	4·0
Redbridge	8·5	0·7
Richmond upon Thames	6·0	−0·4
Sutton	8·2	0·0
Waltham Forest	8·5	2·0
Greater Manchester		
Bolton	6·4	0·1
Bury	7·1	0·1
Manchester	7·8	1·6
Oldham	4·7	0·8
Rochdale	4·8	−2·3
Salford	11·9	−0·4
Stockport	5·4	−0·8
Tameside	6·7	0·3
Trafford	6·3	−0·4
Wigan	7·1	−0·5
Merseyside		
Knowsley	9·5	−0·1
Liverpool	5·9	0·4
Sefton	7·1	−0·4
St. Helens	4·3	−1·1
Wirral	4·3	0·2
South Yorkshire		
Barnsley	5·3	−4·8
Doncaster	6·7	0·7
Rotherham	5·8	−0·3
Sheffield	5·2	−0·5
Tyne and Wear		
Gateshead	7·2	−0·5
Newcastle upon Tyne	5·3	0·4
North Tyneside	7·8	0·6
South Tyneside	6·8	0·5
Sunderland	4·6	−0·6
West Midlands		
Birmingham	6·2	0·8

Local authority	Percentage change 1991-92 to 1992-93 education standard spending assessment per cent.	Percentage change attributable to pupil numbers per cent.
Coventry	7·4	0·1
Dudley	6·4	−0·9
Sandwell	6·1	−0·4
Solihull	6·3	−1·7
Walsall	6·3	0·4
Wolverhampton	4·6	−0·2
West Yorkshire		
Bradford	6·8	0·8
Calderdale	7·1	0·0
Kirklees	6·4	−0·5
Leeds	7·3	−0·2
Wakefield	7·0	0·6
Shire counties		
Avon	5·8	0·1
Bedfordshire	8·2	0·4
Berkshire	7·8	0·1
Buckinghamshire	7·5	0·3
Cambridgeshire	7·6	0·3
Cheshire	6·2	−0·3
Cleveland	6·4	0·3
Cornwall	6·4	−1·0
Cumbria	5·8	−0·3
Derbyshire	6·0	−0·8
Devon	6·9	0·4
Dorset	8·5	0·2
Durham	5·2	−0·3
East Sussex	9·2	0·6
Essex	7·9	−0·7
Gloucestershire	7·0	−0·1
Hampshire	7·2	−0·1
Hereford and Worcester	6·4	−0·3
Hertfordshire	7·3	−0·7
Humberside	6·3	0·0
Isle of Wight	7·8	−0·3
Kent	6·5	−0·7
Lancashire	6·8	−0·6
Leicestershire	7·2	0·1
Lincolnshire	7·0	−0·5
Norfolk	7·6	−0·1
Northamptonshire	8·3	−0·1
Northumberland	6·9	0·5
North Yorkshire	5·9	−0·2
Nottinghamshire	6·2	−0·2
Oxfordshire	6·5	−0·3
Shropshire	5·9	−0·7
Somerset	5·8	−0·4
Staffordshire	7·0	−0·3
Suffolk	6·8	−0·1
Surrey	7·3	−0·9
Warwickshire	5·8	−0·7
West Sussex	8·4	0·2
Wiltshire	6·5	−0·1

Council Tenants Charter

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the cost of preparation, publication and distribution of the council tenants charter.

Sir George Young: The estimated cost of the production, launch and distribution of 1 million copies of the full tenants charter and 5 million copies of the explanatory leaflet is £298,600, subject to final invoices. This includes the cost of translating the booklet into five languages and producing an audio-taped version for blind tenants. Further distribution costs will be incurred in response to demand.

North Yorkshire County Council

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what the total level of Government support to North Yorkshire county council was in 1990-91, and in 1991-92; and what is the projected figure for 1992-93.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 26 February 1992]:* The bulk of North Yorkshire's revenue finance is derived from precepts on collection funds administered by the district councils within the county. The council, however, receives certain specific grants from the Government which are paid directly into its own general fund. Those inside aggregate external finance were estimated to be £33·409 million in 1990-91 and £36·823 million in 1991-92. Estimates for specific grants for 1992-93 are not available as the relevant returns have not yet been received by the Department. In 1992-93, North Yorkshire will also receive an additional grant towards the teachers' pay award of £0·746 million.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crime Statistics

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the number of crimes *(a)* recorded and *(b)* detected by the West Yorkshire police for each year from 1976 to 1991 shown (i) in total and (ii) by each police station.

Mr. John Patten: The available information is given in the table. Figures for 1991 are not available. The chief constable's annual report for West Yorkshire gives crimes recorded and detected by sub-division only.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police in West Yorkshire 1976-90[1]

Year	Offences recorded	Offences cleared up
1976	110,864	57,876
1977	127,942	60,445
1978	122,874	60,250
1979	118,418	43,702
[2]1980	127,527	54,368
1981	138,571	57,191
1982	152,136	63,728
1983	146,307	68,806
1984	158,656	66,731
1985	159,351	67,214
1986	165,586	62,213
1987	173,313	68,062
1988	166,195	71,096
1989	179,185	68,512
1990	227,631	77,073

[1] Excluding criminal damage value £20 and under.
[2] Figures for 1980 onwards are not precisely comparable with those for previous years.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will indicate the number of *(a)* sexual offences and *(b)* sexual assaults against men in each year of the last five years for (i) London and (ii) nationally.

Mr. John Patten: Information on sexual offences recorded by the police for 1986 to 1989 is published in table 2.9 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales 1989" and figures for 1990 are published in table 3 of Home Office "Statistical Bulletin 13/91." The equivalent figures for London are published in Table 13.2 of the "Report of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis 1990". Copies of all these publications are available in the Library.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the number of crimes *(a)* recorded and *(b)* detected by the North Yorkshire police between October 1976 and September 1977 and in the same October to September period each year since then up to October 1990 to September 1991.

Mr. John Patten The available information is contained in the table. Clear up statistics are published only for calendar years.

Notifiable offences recorded in North Yorkshire

Period	Recorded
12 months ending	
September 1977	22,858
September 1978	23,769
September 1979	21,856
September 1980	22,128
September 1981	24,523
September 1982	27,987
September 1983	28,622
September 1984	32,019
September 1985	34,071
September 1986	36,657
September 1987	36,678
September 1988	36,132
September 1989	34,604
September 1990	42,899
September 1991	50,465

Police, North Yorkshire

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the number of additional uniformed police officers, excluding special constables, that have been authorised to be added to the strength of the North Yorkshire police in each year from 1975 to 1991.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is not possible to distinguish between increases in uniformed and non-uniformed police officers as such information is not held centrally. The establishment of the North Yorkshire police has been increased by the following amounts between 1975 and 1990:

Year	Police posts
1975	111
1979	40
1989	15
1990	25
1991	6

The police authority did not request establishment increases in the years 1980-81 to 1987-88 inclusive.

Fingerprint Technology

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made since the publication of Cm 1163 in applying automatic fingerprint recognition technology to the work of the National Identification Bureau.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It remains an objective of the Government to apply automatic fingerprint recognition —AFR—technology to the work of the National

Identification Bureau. To this end, the Home Office has been collaborating with the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the United States of America since autumn 1990 on studying how best to apply this technology to very large collections of fingerprints. Specialist staff are being recruited to the Home Office to manage a programme of work aimed at developing a national automatic fingerprint identification system to support both the identification of arrestees work undertaken presently by the NIB and the matching of fingerprint marks left at scenes of crime.

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether all computerised systems used by police forces in England and Wales to handle fingerprints are *(a)* mutually compatible, *(b)* compatible with the system used in Scotland and *(c)* compatible with other systems in use or being developed by TREVI countries.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The automatic fingerprint recognition —AFR—systems supplied by any particular AFR manufacturer are based on proprietary standards which do not allow these systems to communicate directly with systems supplied by any other manufacturer. As police forces in England and Wales have purchased, or plan to purchase, AFR systems from different manufacturers, these systems will not be compatible. Nor will they all be compatible with the system in Scotland. Similarly, there are a number of different systems in use or being planned in TREVI countries.

The Home Office, the FBI and others, including the suppliers of AFR systems, have been co-operating with the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) in the USA to develop non-proprietary standards for image storage and for the interchange of fingerprint information between different AFR systems. Insofar as police forces in England and Wales purchase systems which meet these non-proprietary standards, these systems will be compatible. This matter is currently being discussed with the Association of Chief Police Officers. The issue of compatibility between AFR systems in use in Europe is being considered by TREVI.

Electoral Roll (Prisoners)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the rules relating to the time at which a prisoner released after 31 October can register on the electoral roll.

Mrs. Rumbold: No. Convicted prisoners who are detained on the qualifying date of 10 October cannot be regarded as resident for electoral registration purposes at either their place of detention or their home address. There is no provision for adding to the register the names of people who became resident after the qualifying date. Released prisoners are in the same position as anyone else who becomes resident after the qualifying date.

Police, West Mercia

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the capital and revenue contributions from central Government to the West Mercia police authority for 1978-79, 1982-83, 1986-87 and 1991-92.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information on the amounts of police specific grant paid by the Home Office to the West Mercia police authority in respect of its expenditure in 1978-79, 1982-83 and 1986-87, and expected to be paid in respect of 1991-92, is as follows. That part of the authority's expenditure which is not met by specific grant is apportioned between its constituent county councils, and their contributions to the authority's expenditure are supported by central Government through the revenue support grant system.

Specific grant paid to West Mercia Police Authority

	£ millions
1978-79[1] [2]	8·2
1982-83[1] [2]	17·8
1986-87[1] [3]	24·1
1991-92[3] [4]	42·7

[1] Grant paid on revenue expenditure, loan charges and revenue contributions to capital expenditure.
[2] Rate of grant 50 per cent.
[3] Rate of grant 51 per cent.
[4] Grant paid on revenue expenditure, loan charges on pre-April 1990 debt, and capital expenditure.

Prison Suicides

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners are recorded as having attempted suicide in 1990 and 1991;

(2) how many prisoners committed acts of self-injury in 1990 and in 1991 which resulted in medical treatment;

(3) how many 15-year-old boys and girls in prison attempted suicide in 1990 and 1991.

Mrs. Rumbold *[holding answer 10 February 1992]:* In 1991 there was a recorded total of 2,846 acts of deliberate self-harm by prisoners in Her Majesty's Prison Service establishments. (Some prisoners committed acts of deliberate self-harm on more than one occasion.) Of the total, 11 were committed by 15-year-old prisoners.

All reported acts of deliberate self-harm result in medical treatment. There may be some cases, however, in which the prisoners harmed themselves in a minor way but did not bring this to the attention of staff, and so the injury would not have been reported.

It is not possible to distinguish reliably how many acts of deliberate self-harm were suicidal in intent.

The information requested for 1990 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Middle East

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the middle east peace process; and if he will list the forthcoming bilateral and multilateral meetings.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A fourth round of bilateral negotiations started in Washington on 24 February. The first substantive meetings of the five multilateral working groups set up at the co-ordinating meeting in Moscow at the end of January are due to take place at the end of April and the beginning of May. They will cover economic development, water issues, the environment, refugees and arms control. We continue, with our European partners, to give full support to the process. Progress is bound to be slow but some momentum has now been achieved.

NATO Secretary-General

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions were held with the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in advance of his recent visit to Ukraine and Russia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The alliance's relations with the republics of the former Soviet Union have been regularly discussed at NATO, and the Secretary-General told allies of his plans to visit the Ukraine and Russia well in advance.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Morocco

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's position on the recent decision of the European Parliament to suspend EC aid to Morocco.

Mrs. Chalker: The European Parliament vote on 15 January denied the necessary assent to the proposed EC/Morocco fourth financial protocol. Her Majesty's Government support the protocol as an important element in strengthening EC relations with Morocco. We believe that concern over human rights is best expressed separately and does not justify withholding assent to this protocol which we believe should be implemented.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Jury Trials

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Attorney-General for each of the last three years for which figures are available, how many people elected for trial by jury; how many of those who elected for trial by jury were subsequently convicted; and how many of those who were convicted had a previous conviction, for an offence involving violence or dishonesty, whether or not such convictions were spent within the meaning of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

Mr. John Patten: I have been asked to reply.
I will write to the hon. Member.

ENERGY

Offshore Oil and Gas

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish a table showing the regional breakdown of British oil and gas production, defined by the regional location of the terminals at which offshore oil and gas was landed, and the wellhead site in the case of onshore oil and gas.

Mr. Moynihan: The information in tabular form, on a provisional basis, for 1991 is as follows:

Offshore oil and gas landings by region/terminal for 1991

Region/Terminal	*Crude (million tonnes)*	*Natural gas liquids (million tonnes)*	*Gas (million cubic metres)*
East Anglia			
Bacton	—	0·1	18,897
East Midlands			
Theddlethorpe	—	0·1	9,424
North			
Barrow	—	0·1	6,701
Yorkshire/Humber			
Easington	—	0·1	2,770
Dimlington	—	0·0	4,664
Regional Total	—	0·1	7,434
Scotland			
St. Fergus	—	2·1	9,242
Flotta	8·9	0·2	—
Forties	16·6	0·9	—
Nigg	1·0	—	—
Sullom Voe	35·4	0·7	—
Regional Total	61·9	3·9	9,242
Grand Total	61·9	4·3	51,698

Note:
In addition to the gas landed at terminals 3,346 million cubic metres was produced and used mostly on production platforms. This gives an overall production figure for 1991 of 55,440 million cubic metres.

Onshore oil and gas production by region for 1991

Region	*Oil (million tonnes)*	*Gas (million cubic metres)*
East Midlands	0·2	24
South East	0·2	[1]21
South West[2]	3·2	153
Total	[3]3·7	198

[1] Includes 3·9 from other land fields.
[2] Additional 0·1 million tonnes of NGL's were produced onshore in the South West region.
[3] Due to rounding the sum of the constituent items may not equal the total.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish a table showing the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in his Department in each of grades (i) 1, (ii) 2, (iii) 3, (iv) 4, (v) 5, (vi) 6, (vii) 7, (viii) SEO, (ix) HEO, (x) administrative trainee, (xi) EO, (xii) CO and (xiii) CA.

Mr. Wakeham: The information requested is in the following table:

Grade	*Males*	*Females*
1	1·0	—
2	2·0	—
3	10·0	—
4	1·0	—
5	31·0	3·0
6	21·0	1·0
7	121·5	12·0
SEO	39·0	3·5
HEO	77·0	19·0
Admin. Trainee	1·0	—
EO	88·0	43·0
AO (CO)	50·5	79·0
AA (CA)	25·5	31·0

Notes:
1. Figures are as at 1 April 1991.
2. Full-time staff count as 1 and part-time staff 0·5.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the total number of employees in his Department; and how many are *(a)* black and *(b)* disabled.

Mr. Wakeham: As at 1 April 1991 the Department employed 969 staff of whom 808 (83 per cent.) had responded to the surveys; of the respondents 85 (10·4 per cent.) have identified themselves as from the ethnic minorities. As at 1 June 1991 there were 13 registered disabled staff in the Department. These figures are on a headcount basis, that is, full and part-time staff count as one.

Energy Efficiency

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will extend the energy management and assessment scheme to include grants for equipment installed as part of an energy efficiency drive.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No. The energy management assistance scheme is designed to help with the cost of consultancy and project management costs. Any capital investment identified as necessary within the scheme will be recovered in a short period from greater efficiency and savings.

PRIME MINISTER

Market Research

Mr. Gould: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the companies recently commissioned by his office, the Cabinet Office and the citizens charter unit to carry out polling and market research; and if he will list the areas of research, the questionnaires to be used and the groups to be questioned.

The Prime Minister: No such research has been commissioned recently by my office, the Cabinet Office or the citizens charter unit.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Company Directors

Mr. Bell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many applications have been made by him or his predecessors to the courts for the disqualification of directors under the terms and provisions of the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986; how many have been successful; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many referrals there were to the disqualification unit of the Department of Trade and Industry for applications to be made for the disqualification of directors under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 for the years 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will set out the criteria under which applications are made to the court for the disqualification of directors under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: The criteria under which applications are made for the disqualification of directors under section 6 of the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 on the ground of unfitness are set out in schedule I to that Act. They include breach of duty, misapplication of funds, contraventions of the Companies Acts and the Insolvency Act and the extent of a director's responsibility for the causes of the company becoming insolvent. The courts must have regard to these matters in determining whether a person's conduct as a director of a particular company or companies makes him unfit to be concerned in the management of companies generally.

The following numbers of unfit conduct reports have been made by official receivers and insolvency practitioners:

	Numbers
1987	3,115
1988	4,231
1989	3,234
1990	4,235
1991	5,747
	20,562

In the period from 28 April 1986 to 31 December 1991, 2,184 disqualification applications have been made under section 6 of the Act; 1,193 orders have been made and 190 applications have been dismissed or withdrawn.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support has been, and is being provided to Northern Ireland industrialists by way of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Mr. Sainsbury: The full range of ECGD facilities continues to be available to companies carrying on business in Northern Ireland.

Beer Orders

Mr. Crowther: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent meetings he has had with representatives of brewery companies on matters related to the implementation of the beer orders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: I met the chairman of Grand Metropolitan plc, on 30 January 1992. My officials have also had recent meetings with a number of brewers about the implementation of the beer orders.

Barlow Clowes (Government Shareholdings)

Sir Robin Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when and in what manner Her Majesty's Government intend to dispose of the shareholdings which they acquired following the transfer of assets from the collapsed Barlow Clowes holdings.

Mr. Lilley: The assets of the former Barlow Clowes entities are being administered by the appointed office holders.

WALES

Equal Opportunities

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number of employees in his Department; and how many are *(a)* black and *(b)* disabled.

Mr. David Hunt: As at 1 January 1992 my Department employed 2,411 whole-time equivalent staff; 32 respondents to the ethnic origin survey have described themselves as being of ethnic minority; 41 members of staff have chosen to register as disabled.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in his Department in each of grades (i) 1, (ii) 2, (iii) 3, (iv) 4, (v) 5, (vi) 6, (vii) 7, (viii) SEO, (ix) HEO, (x) administrative trainee, (xi) EO, (xii) CO and (xiii) CA.

Mr. David Hunt: The numbers of staff, as at 1 April 1991 were:

Grade[1]	*Men*	*Women*
1	1	—
2	2	—
3	10	1
4	6	—
5	55	10
6	74	13
7	133	29
SEO	113	21
HEO	164	89
AT and HEO (D)	4	3
EO	191	235
AO	169	317
AA	113	199

[1] Including equivalent professional grades.

Second Home Owners

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the amount of poll tax received by each local authority in Wales which derived from second home owners within the local authority area in both 1990 and 1991; and what are the estimated levels of council tax to be collected from second home owners in each local authority area in Wales for the first year of its operation.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information on local authority standard charge income derived from second homes in Wales is not held centrally. Council tax income from second home owners in Wales will depend on the number of discretionary discounts awarded by local authorities, the valuation of the properties concerned, and the tax set by each local authority for 1993-94.

Ministerial Record

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* his departmental failures and *(b)* his departmental achievements over the past year.

Mr. David Hunt: I shall be making a statement on the performance of my Department in the Welsh day debate on Thursday 27 February.

Roads

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends updating the information given in the 1991 supplement to "Roads in Wales: Progress and Plans for the 1990s."

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have today published the 1992 supplement to "Roads in Wales: Progress and Plans for the 1990s". Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

EMPLOYMENT

Training

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women taking Government employment training courses and registered as living in the London borough of Wandsworth as of 18 February.

Mr. Jackson: In the period 1 April 1991 to 5 January 1992 it is provisionally estimated that here were 20,500 employment training (ET) entrants in the London region. Of these about 56 per cent. were men and 44 per cent. were women.

Absolute numbers are not available because information about gender is not provided for all trainees.

Training and enterprise councils (TECs) are required to ensure the promotion of equality of opportunity between all individuals in access to, treatment on, and outcome from the agreement between the Secretary of State and the TECs.

Trainees

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what guidance he gives to training and enterprise councils on the levels of output-related funding for organisations training trainees with severe learning difficulties;

(2) what guidance he gives to TECs on developing performance indicators for output related funding specifically suited to providers training special needs trainees with learning difficulties.

Mr. Jackson: Output-related funding is paid to training and enterprise councils by the Department for a number of outputs under employment training and youth training. In 1992-93, these will include City and Guilds of London Institute wordpower and numberpower qualifications for trainees with severe literacy and numeracy difficulties, and national vocational qualifications at level 1 for YT trainees with special training needs for whom training aimed at NVQ level 2 is not thought to be realistic. It is entirely a matter for training and enterprise councils as to how they pass on funds to training providers.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the level of funding for special needs training within the youth training and employment training budgets for 1992-93.

Mr. Jackson: TECs are obliged to take into account training needs of special needs clients within their business plans.

The proportion of training budgets allocated to provision for people with special training needs is the responsibility of individual training and enterprise councils (TECs) and is determined by local needs and priorities.

Older Workers

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what will be the composition of the advisory group to assist in encouraging, identifying and disseminating good employment practice with regard to older workers, as proposed in "People, Jobs and Opportunity" (Cm. 1810).

Mr. Jackson: I shall chair the advisory group for older workers as the Minister with responsibility for equal opportunity in employment. The membership will be chosen from a variety of sources, including voluntary sector organisations representing the interests of older people, and organisations representing the interests of employers and employees. I am particularly keen to see women well represented in the group. There may also be places for individuals known to have an interest in the field.

Degrees

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the percentage of the population within each region of the country, including Greater London, who hold first degrees.

Mr. Jackson: The latest available estimates are given in the following table.

Percentage of persons of working age who hold a degree[1]

Region	*Percentage*
Great Britain	8·5
North	5·6
Yorkshire and Humberside	6·0
East Midlands	7·5
East Anglia	8·2
South East	12·1
Greater London	14·7
Rest of South East	10·4
South West	7·7
West Midlands	6·4
North West	7·2
Wales	6·0
Scotland	7·1

[1] Includes first degrees, higher degrees and other degree level qualifications such as graduate membership of a professional institute.
Persons of working ages comprise men aged 16-64 and women aged 16-59.
Labour Force Survey: Spring 1990.

Labour Statistics, York

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many full-time males, part-time males, full-time females and part-time females in employment in the City of York currently earn less than £3·40 per hour.

Mr. Forth: The information from the "1991 New Earnings Survey" closest to that requested is given in the following table.

Employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence: Percentage whose gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime) were less than £3·40.

North Yorkshire	*April 1991*
Full-time males	9·4
Part-time males	n/a
Full-time females	18·3
Part-time females	45·5

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many jobs were on offer in jobcentres in York in each month since January 1990.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the total number of men and women in employment, both full and part-time, in the City of York, and the number in each of these categories who currently earn *(a)* more than £21,060 per annum, *(b)* more than £35,000 per annum, *(c)* more than £40,000 per annum and *(d)* more than £50,000 per annum.

Mr. Forth: The latest available information about employment in local areas is from the 1989 census of employment and relates to employees only. The numbers of employees in employment in the York local authority district at September 1989 were as follows:

	Thousands
Males	
Full time	25·5
Part time	2·4
Females	
Full time	15·6
Part time	15·0

Information on the percentages of employees earning more than certain amounts per week is available from the "1991 New Earnings Survey". Figures are available only at county level and for full-time employees. They are given in the following table, for the available levels of weekly earnings which correspond most closely to the annual amounts specified in the question.

Full-time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence:
Percentage with gross weekly earnings above the following amounts

	North Yorkshire		*April 1991*	
	£ 390	*£ 600*	*£ 700*	*£ 900*
Men	16·0	2·6	1·2	0·4
Women	4·1	0·6	0·2	0·2

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing the number of full-time employees in employment in the City of York in 1979 and in each year since *(a)* in all manufacturing jobs and *(b)* in each of the following industrial groups (i) railways, (ii) cocoa, chocolate and sugar confectionery, (iii) manufacturing of railway and tramway vehicles, (iv) printing and publishing, (v) scheduled road passenger transport, (vi) road haulage, (vii) postal services and (viii) telecommunications.

Mr. Jackson: Information for employees in employment according to industry and by district is available only from the censuses of employment for 1981, 1984, 1987 and 1989. This can be obtained, subject to the confidentially restrictions of the Statistics of Trade Act 1947, from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing the average gross weekly earnings of full-time males, full-time females and part-time females on adult rates in *(a)* the City of York, *(b)* north Yorkshire, *(c)* England, *(d)* Greater London and *(e)* the City of Canterbury in 1979 and each year since then.

Mr. Forth: The available information is published in tables 110 and 113 of part E and table 180 of part F of the "New Earnings Survey" reports for each year since 1979, except for that shown in the following table. Information is not available for the cities of York or Canterbury.

Average gross weekly earnings of part time women employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence

£ per week — April each year

County	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
North Yorkshire	23·5	29·9	34·7	37·9	39·9	42·8	44·1	47·8	52·6	54·1	62·8	68·2	77·2
Kent	26·8	32·8	40·0	42·0	47·4	49·7	56·4	59·9	61·7	67·8	69·6	79·7	89·8

Source: New Earnings Survey.
Note: It is estimated that around one fifth of part time women employees were not covered by the survey because their gross weekly earnings were below the PAYE threshold.

Job Centre, Stamford-le-Hope

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will consider re-opening the Stamford-le-Hope jobcentre.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

HEALTH

Ozone Layer

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been undertaken to identify the groups most at risk from the consequences of the thinning of the ozone layer in the northern hemisphere.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) on 20 December 1991 at column *354*.

Skin Cancer

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of cases and deaths from skin cancer in 1970, 1980 and between the years 1985 and 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: The available data are set out in the table. The upward trend in the number of both registrations and deaths from malignant melanoma of the skin is a matter of concern. The possible relation between this trend and exposure to UV radiation is one of the issues on which we are seeking advice from the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE), as announced in my reply to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) on 20 February at column *272*.

The total number of: 1) Cases (registrations); and 2) deaths, from skin cancer (ICD's 172 and 173), by sex, 1971 1980, 1985 and 1986. 1987-1990, deaths only. England and Wales

ICD—Site description—Year	Sex	Registrations	Deaths
172—Malignant melanoma of skin			
1971	Male	357	234
	Female	770	370
1980	Male	656	361
	Female	1,264	452
1985	Male	931	455
	Female	1,725	532
1986	Male	989	445
	Female	1,813	595
1987	Male	—	464
	Female	—	566
1988	Male	—	470
	Female	—	608
1989	Male	—	493
	Female	—	606
1990	Male	—	564
	Female	—	606
173—Other malignant neoplasm of skin			
1971	Male	8,633	248
	Female	7,330	209
1980	Male	10,827	193
	Female	9,388	173
1985	Male	12,597	263
	Female	10,746	199
1986	Male	14,152	229
	Female	12,615	183
1987	Male	—	263
	Female	—	178
1988	Male	—	246
	Female	—	184
1989	Male	—	255
	Female	—	192
1990	Male	—	257
	Female	—	179

Capital and Revenue Expenditure, Shropshire

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the capital and revenue expenditure by Shropshire health authority and its predecessor authority in 1978-79, 1982-83, 1986-87 and 1991-92;

(2) what was the capital and revenue expenditure on family practitioner services in Shropshire in 1978-79, 1982-83, 1986-87 and 1991-92.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested and derived from annual accounts submitted to the Department for the financial years 1978-79, 1982-83, 1986-87 and 1990-91 (the latest available) is shown in the table. Equivalent information for 1991-92 will be available in the autumn.

Shropshire health authority

	Total revenue expenditure		*Total capital expenditure*	
	£000 (cash)	*£000 (at 1991-92 prices)*	*£000 (cash)*	*£000 (at 1991-92 prices)*
1978-79	29,127	79,017	1,011	2,742
1982-83	52,346	87,554	3,651	6,106
1986-87	67,376	94,117	8,648	12,054
1990-91	100,730	107,781	8,629	9,233

Shropshire family health services authority

	Total expenditure on family health services	
	£000 (cash)	*£000 (at 1991-92 prices)*
1978-79	10,956	29,721
1982-83	21,248	35,540
1986-87	28,777	40,199
1990-91	45,000	48,150

Sources: Annual accounts of the Shropshire health authority, the West Midlands regional health authority and the Shropshire family health services authority and those of the predecessor health authorities and family practitioner committee (FPC).

Notes:

1. The figures have been expressed at 1991-92 prices by the use of the gross domestic product deflators.
2. The figures for total capital expenditure include costs for schemes within Shropshire which were accounted for by the west Midlands regional health authority (RHA). All expenditure incurred by that RHA for its region as a whole is excluded.
3. Capital expenditure in particular localities tends to vary from year to year mainly reflecting changes in the pattern of capital investment throughout the country.
4. All expenditure on family health services—FHS (formerly family practitioner services)—is essentially regarded as current (i.e. revenue) expenditure. It is not strictly attributable to particular districts and is recorded in annual accounts after the deduction of charges to patients.
5. The FHS figures for 1986-87 and 1990-91 also include the administrative expenses of the Shropshire family health services authority—£268,000 (cash) revenue, and £145,000 (cash) capital, in 1986-87 and £799,000 (cash) revenue, in 1990-91. Prior to 1 April 1985 the Shropshire FPC was associated with the Shropshire district (formerly area) health authority and its administrative costs formed a comparatively small part of the health authority's total expenditure and are not separately identifiable.

Chemists (Drug Purchases)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the value to the NHS of the discount claw-back on drug purchases privately negotiated by pharmaceutical chemists in each of the past four years for which figures are available.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The discount recovered from community pharmacists in England and Wales in each of the past four years is given in the table.

Year	*Discount recovered £ million*
1987-88	134·0
1988-89	154·7
1989-90	171·5
1990-91	220·5

The discount recovery scheme ensures that the NHS benefits from the discounts pharmacists receive from wholesalers and manufacturers. The increase over the four years is due partly to increased drug costs and partly to increased discounts achieved.

Health Authorities (Staff)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for *(a)* each regional health authority and *(b)* each district health authority the number of (i) nurses and midwives, (ii) medical staff, (iii) general and senior managers, (iv) administrative and clerical staff, (v) ancillary staff and (vi) ambulance staff for 1991.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The regional health authority data are not yet available. District data could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Generic Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new initiatives he intends to produce to increase the proportions of generic drugs prescribed by general practitioners.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The proportion of prescriptions written generically has risen from 20 per cent. in 1979 to 44 per cent. in 1990 as a result of the policies pursued by this Government. Further initiatives were introduced this year, with the indicative prescribing scheme and the appointment by each family health services authority of prescribing medical advisers. Medical advisers encourage general practitioners to prescribe drugs by their generic names for reasons of good professional practice and because of the opportunities for savings such prescribing creates.

Eye Tests and Dental Checks

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what would be the full year cost to the Exchequer in 1991-92 of introducing free eye tests and dental checks for *(a)* all people over state retirement age, *(b)* all those in receipt of a disability benefit and *(c)* both *(a)* and *(b)* together.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The estimated cost of introducing free sight tests for all people aged 65 and over in England for 1991-92 is approximately £25 million, and for introducing free dental examinations approximately £7 million. No estimate is available for people in receipt of a disability benefit. About 40 per cent. of the population are exempt from charges for dental examinations and sight tests.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the estimated saving to the Exchequer

from the abolition of free dental check-ups in the financial years *(a)* 1990-91, *(b)* 1991-92 and *(c)* 1992-93, in the United Kingdom;

(2) what would be the cost of every 10p reduction in the charges for *(a)* eye tests, *(b)* dental check-ups and *(c)* prescriptions, in 1991-92 and 1992-93, in the United Kingdom;

(3) what is the estimated saving to the Exchequer from the abolition of free eye tests in the financial years *(a)* 1990-91, *(b)* 1991-92 and *(c)* 1992-93 in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 24 February 1992]:* The estimated income from dental examination charges in England was about £55 million in 1990-91. We currently anticipate revenue of some £58 million in 1991-92, and £61 million in 1992-93. About 40 per cent. of the population are exempt from dental examination charges.

The cost of each 10p reduction in the charge for dental examinations is estimated at about £1·5 million in England in 1991-92; costs in 1992-93 would be similar. The cost of a notional 10p reduction from the current prescription charge level is estimated at a minimum of about £4 million in England in 1991-92, rising to about £5 million in 1992-93.

Costs would accelerate for each subsequent incremental reduction. There are no charges for NHS sight tests which are available to approximately 40 per cent. of the population.

Restricting entitlements to NHS sight tests to priority groups has resulted in estimated savings in England of about £90 million in 1990-91, with projected savings of about £100 million in 1991-92 and £110 million in 1992-93. The full year cost of re-introducing free NHS sight tests for everyone is estimated to be £165 million.

Information on Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in his Department in each of grades (i) 1, (ii) 2, (iii) 3, (iv) 4, (v) 5, (vi) 6, (vii) 7, (viii) SEO, (ix) HEO, (x) administrative trainee, (xi) EO, (xii) CO and (xiii) CA.

Miss Widdecombe: The information for the Department, including its agencies, at 31 January 1992 is in the table.

Grade[1]	Men	Women	Total
1	1	0	1
2	4	0	4
3	9	6	15
4	5	2	7
5	38	16	54
6	72	19	91
7	432	94	526
SEO	1,164	302	1,466
HEO	3,518	1,901	5,419
HEO (D)[2]	7	12	19
EO	9,142	13,600	22,742
AO[3]	9,049	29,407	38,456
AA[3]	3,147	9,456	12,603
Total	26,500	54,793	81,293

[1] For each grade we have included equivalent professional grades.
[2] Includes Administrative Trainees.
[3] The AO and AA grades have replaced the CO and CA grades.

Claimants, Leeds

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in the month of January in the Leeds metropolitan district how many people in receipt of income support or housing benefit were registered as being in receipt of retirement pension, disabled, or having children aged under five years; and how many of those so registered received cold weather payments.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Benefits, York

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in York were in receipt of supplementary benefit in each year from 1979 to 1987; and how many were in receipt of income support in each year since then.

Miss Widdecombe: The complete range of information requested in this question is not available. This is because statistics of a local nature are destroyed at regular intervals ranging from 18 months to five years. The information available from 1987 has been drawn from the income support management information statistics.

Statistics relating to supplementary benefit and income support recipients are collected from benefit offices on a quarterly basis. The figures show the number of recipients at a given date rather than for a particular period.

The York benefit office covers an area of approximately 450 square miles. It is not possible, except at disproportionate cost, to identify those customers who were living in the city of York itself. The figures for York benefit office since May 1987 are in the table.

Customers in receipt of Supplementary Benefit or Income Support from York benefit office since May 1987

Year	February	May	August	November
Supplementary Benefit (Predecessor of Income Support)				
1987	—	15,109	15,423	14,705
Income Support				
1988	[1]—	13,784	14,252	13,507
1989	14,063	13,660	14,251	13,979
1990	14,344	12,723	13,734	13,826
1991	14,445	13,893	14,637	14,705

[1] A quarterly supplementary benefit count was not conducted in February 1988.

Community Care, York

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table indicating *(a)* the number of applications for community care grants received, *(b)* the number of community care grants paid and *(c)* the cash value of community care grants paid by the York local office in each month from January 1990 to

December 1991 for each of the (i) elderly, (ii) mentally ill/handicaped, (iii) disabled/chronically sick, (iv) young persons leaving local authority care, (v) persons who have misused drugs/alcohol, (vi) ex-offenders, (vii) persons without a settled way of life and (viii) families under exceptional pressure priority groups.

Mr. Scott: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency that the information is not available in the form requested.

Social Fund, York

Mr. Cabora: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will *(a)* state how many applications for social fund loans from the York local office were refused on the grounds of inability to pay and *(b)* show this figure as a percentage of all applications for loans from the York local office in 1988-89, 1989-90, 1990-91 and so far in 1991-92.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Social Security Benefits

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for each social security benefit what has been *(a)* the number of claimants, *(b)* the cash expenditure and *(c)* the expenditure expressed in 1991 prices for each year since 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: The available information is in the following tables.

Table 1: Estimated average numbers receiving benefit at any one time

(thousands)

	1978-79	*1979-80*
Benefit		
Retirement Pension	8,530	8,680
Widows' Benefit	495	490
Unemployment Benefit	570	550
Sickness Benefit	560	490
Statutory Sick Pay	—	—
Invalidity Benefit	600	620
Death Grant	—	—
Industrial Disablement Benefit	270	270
Industrial Death Benefit	30	30
Other II Benefits	—	—
Maternity Allowance	100	115
Statutory Maternity Pay	—	—
Non-contributory RP	65	55
War Pension	385	370
Attendance Allowance	265	285
Invalid Care Allowance	5	5
Severe Disablement Allowance	150	165
Mobility Allowance	95	140
Income Support/Support Benefit	3,020	2,920
Child Benefit (Children)	13,480	13,330
One Parent Benefit	290	370
Family Credit/FIS	85	80
Rate Rebate	3,055	3,065
Rent Allowance	225	220
Rent Rebate	1,210	1,205
Community Charge Benefit	—	—

	1980-81	*1981-82*
Benefit		
Retirement Pension	8,880	9,015
Widows' Benefit	475	460
Unemployment Benefit	960	1,220
Sickness Benefit	435	445
Statutory Sick Pay	—	—
Invalidity Benefit	620	660
Death Grant	—	—
Industrial Disablement Benefit	265	260
Industrial Death Benefit	30	30
Other II Benefits	—	—
Maternity Allowance	120	125
Statutory Maternity Pay	—	—
Non-contributory RP	50	50
War Pension	360	345
Attendance Allowance	315	350
Invalid Care Allowance	5	5
Severe Disablement Allowance	175	180
Mobility Allowance	185	210
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit	3,110	3,725
Child Benefit (Children)	13,160	13,145
One Parent Benefit	430	470
Family Credit/FIS	95	125
Rate Rebate	3,350	3,700
Rent Allowance	240	250
Rent Rebate	1,330	1,590
Community Charge Benefit	—	—

	1982-83	*1983-84*
Benefit		
Retirement Pension	9,115	9,210
Widows' Benefit	445	440
Unemployment Benefit	1,090	1,020
Sickness Benefit	395	170
Statutory Sick Pay	—	—
Invalidity Benefit	700	760
Death Grant	—	—
Industrial Disablement Benefit	265	265
Industrial Death Benefit	30	30
Other II Benefits	—	—
Maternity Allowance	125	110
Statutory Maternity Pay	—	—
Non-contributory RP	45	40
War Pension	330	315
Attendance Allowance	390	445
Invalid Care Allowance	10	10
Severe Disablement Allowance	195	210
Mobility Allowance	265	315
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit	4,165	4,435
Child Benefit (Children)	12,890	12,660
One Parent Benefit	510	540
Family Credit/FIS	165	200
Rate Rebate	5,320	7,020
Rent Allowance	260	1,015
Rent Rebate	3,050	3,735
Community Charge Benefit	—	—

	1984-85	*1985-86*
Benefit		
Retirement Pension	9,350	9,400
Widows' Benefit	425	410
Unemployment Benefit	1,020	955
Sickness Benefit	180	160
Statutory Sick Pay	240	245
Invalidity Benefit	825	805
Death Grant	—	—
Industrial Disablement Benefit	260	265
Industrial Death Benefit	30	30
Other II Benefits	—	—
Maternity Allowance	120	115
Statutory Maternity Pay	—	—
Non-contributory RP	35	35
War Pension	305	295
Attendance Allowance	490	555
Invalid Care Allowance	10	10
Severe Disablement Allowance	245	245
Mobility Allowance	390	420
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit	4,665	4,765

	1984-85	1985-86
Child Benefit (Children)	12,430	12,375
One Parent Benefit	565	590
Family Credit/FIS	205	205
Rate Rebate	7,230	7,020
Rent Allowance	1,080	1,150
Rent Rebate	3,745	3,710
Community Charge Benefit	—	—

	1986-87	1987-88
Benefit		
Retirement Pension	9,575	9,685
Widows' Benefit	400	385
Unemployment Benefit	1,005	815
Sickness Benefit	100	105
Statutory Sick Pay	320	345
Invalidity Benefit	935	1,010
Death Grant	—	—
Industrial Disablement Benefit	285	290
Industrial Death Benefit	30	25
Other II Benefits	—	—
Maternity Allowance	110	30
Statutory Maternity Pay	—	80
Non-contributory RP	40	35
War Pension	280	270
Attendance Allowance	605	670
Invalid Care Allowance	25	80
Severe Disablement Allowance	265	265
Mobility Allowance	460	515
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit	5,095	5,020
Child Benefit (Children)	12,175	12,040
One Parent Benefit	615	660
Family Credit/FIS	215	220
Rate Rebate	7,050	6,875
Rent Allowance	1,180	1,195
Rent Rebate	3,720	3,665
Community Charge Benefit	—	—

	1988-89	1989-90
Benefit		
Retirement Pension	9,710	9,795
Widows' Benefit	370	375
Unemployment Benefit	600	375
Sickness Benefit	105	105
Statutory Sick Pay	365	360
Invalidity Benefit	1,100	1,190
Death Grant	—	—
Industrial Disablement Benefit	295	295
Industrial Death Benefit	30	30
Other II Benefits	—	—
Maternity Allowance	15	20
Statutory Maternity Pay	80	90
Non-contributory RP	35	35
War Pension	265	265
Attendance Allowance	730	795
Invalid Care Allowance	100	115
Severe Disablement Allowance	270	280
Mobility Allowance	560	585
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit	4,310	4,155
Child Benefit (Children)	12,010	12,000
One Parent Benefit	705	735
Family Credit/FIS	280	305
Rate Rebate	5,150	4,320
Rent Allowance	965	955
Rent Rebate	3,125	2,950
Community Charge Benefit	—	865

	1990-91	1991-92
Benefit		
Retirement Pension	9,895	9,9920
Widows' Benefit	350	350
Unemployment Benefit	425	650
Sickness Benefit	105	120
Statutory Sick Pay	355	345
Invalidity Benefit	1,265	1,325
Death Grant	—	—
Industrial Disablement Benefit	305	330
Industrial Death Benefit	25	25
Other II Benefits	—	—
Maternity Allowance	20	20
Statutory Maternity Pay	80	85
Non-contributory RP	35	35
War Pension	255	260
Attendance Allowance	875	970
Invalid Care Allowance	135	155
Severe Disablement Allowance	290	300
Mobility Allowance	620	660
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit	4,190	4,820
Child Benefit (Children)	12,135	12,185
One Parent Benefit	760	835
Family Credit/FIS	320	250
Rate Rebate	—	—
Rent Allowance	1,030	1,115
Rent Rebate	2,925	3,085
Community Charge Benefit	6,740	6,570

Table 2
Expenditure in cash terms

(£ million)

	1978-79	1979-80
Benefit		
Retirement Pension	7,552	8,816
Christmas Bonus-Contributory	96	96
Widows' Benefit	505	563
Unemployment Benefit	632	653
Sickness Benefit	696	655
Statutory Sick Pay	—	—
Invalidity Benefit	840	995
Death Grant	16	16
Industrial Disablement Benefit	216	244
Industrial Death Benefit	32	36
Other II Benefits	5	5
Maternity Allowance	105	125
Maternity Grant	16	16
Statutory Maternity Pay	—	—
Guardian's Allowance/CSA	2	2
Non-contributory RP	37	36
Christmas Bonus-Non-Contributory	5	5
War Pension	340	375
Attendance Allowance	168	201
Invalid Care Allowance	4	4
Severe Disablement Allowance	69	85
Mobility Allowance	47	79
Income Support/Support Benefit	2,256	2,436
Child Benefit	1,776	2,787
One Parent Benefit	22	43
Family Credit/FIS	24	27
Maternity Grant	16	16
Independent Living Fund	—	—
Motability	—	—
Rate Rebate	165	201
Rent Allowance	38	40
Rent Rebate	207	238
Community Charge Benefit	—	—

	1980-81	1981-82
Benefit		
Retirement Pension	10,526	12,126
Christmas Bonus-Contributory	98	101
Widows' Benefit	638	691
Unemployment Benefit	1,280	1,702
Sickness Benefit	654	680
Statutory Sick Pay	—	—
Invalidity Benefit	1,150	1,370
Death Grant	16	17
Industrial Disablement Benefit	282	315
Industrial Death Benefit	42	47
Other II Benefits	5	5

	1980-81	1981-82
Maternity Allowance	149	158
Maternity Grant	16	16
Statutory Maternity Pay	—	—
Guardian's Allowance/CSA	2	2
Non-contributory RP	38	39
Christmas Bonus-Non-Contributory	5	6
War Pension	424	479
Attendance Allowance	260	330
Invalid Care Allowance	5	6
Severe Disablement Allowance	108	130
Mobility Allowance	125	173
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit	3,172	4,840
Child Benefit	2,944	3,372
One Parent Benefit	61	76
Family Credit/FIS	42	66
Maternity Grant	16	16
Independent Living Fund	—	—
Motability	—	—
Rate Rebate	271	381
Rent Allowance	48	65
Rent Rebate	317	497
Community Charge Benefit	—	—

	1982-83	1983-84
Benefit		
Retirement Pension	13,549	14,613
Christmas Bonus—Contributory	102	103
Widows' Benefit	725	771
Unemployment Benefit	1,500	1,497
Sickness Benefit	554	265
Statutory Sick Pay	—	—
Invalidity Benefit	1,593	1,872
Death Grant	17	17
Industrial Disablement Benefit	343	369
Industrial Death Benefit	51	54
Other II Benefits	5	5
Maternity Allowance	152	141
Maternity Grant	16	17
Statutory Maternity Pay	—	—
Guardian's Allowance/CSA	2	2
Non-contributory RP	40	41
Christmas Bonus—Non-Contributory	6	6
War Pension	504	524
Attendance Allowance	403	495
Invalid Care Allowance	8	10
Severe Disablement Allowance	154	182
Mobility Allowance	236	304
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit	6,261	5,591
Child Benefit	3,660	3,988
One Parent Benefit	91	107
Family Credit/FIS	94	123
Maternity Grant	16	17
Independent Living Fund	—	—
Motability	—	—
Rate Rebate	550	1,220
Rent Allowance	74	536
Rent Rebate	929	1,980
Community Charge Benefit	—	—

	1984-85	1985-86
Benefit		
Retirement Pension	15,268	16,584
Christmas Bonus—Contributory	105	105
Widows' Benefit	785	800
Unemployment Benefit	1,578	1,589
Sickness Benefit	279	276
Statutory Sick Pay	508	545
Invalidity Benefit	2,142	2,349
Death Grant	17	18
Industrial Disablement Benefit	381	407
Industrial Death Benefit	55	58
Other II Benefits	5	5
Maternity Allowance	161	164
Maternity Grant	18	17
Statutory Maternity Pay	—	—

	1984-85	1985-86
Guardian's Allowance/CSA	2	1
Non-contributory RP	39	41
Christmas Bonus—Non-Contributory	6	7
War Pension	544	581
Attendance Allowance	576	686
Invalid Care Allowance	11	13
Severe Disablement Allowance	236	266
Mobility Allowance	356	422
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit	6,444	7,377
Child Benefit	4,276	4,468
One Parent Benefit	120	134
Family Credit/FIS	126	130
Maternity Grant	18	17
Independent Living Fund	—	—
Motability	—	—
Rate Rebate	1,291	1,442
Rent Allowance	645	792
Rent Rebate	2,065	2,225
Community Charge Benefit	—	—

	1986-87	1987-88
Benefit		
Retirement Pension	17,779	18,648
Christmas Bonus-Contributory	107	107
Widows' Benefit	825	839
Unemployment Benefit	1,734	1,468
Sickness Benefit	179	193
Statutory Sick Pay	757	840
Invalidity Benefit	2,673	2,968
Death Grant	18	3
Industrial Disablement Benefit	440	453
Industrial Death Benefit	61	56
Other II Benefits	4	4
Maternity Allowance	168	51
Maternity Grant	14	—
Statutory Maternity Pay	—	193
Guardian's Allowance/CSA	2	1
Non-contributory RP	37	37
Christmas Bonus-Non-Contributory	8	9
War Pension	590	599
Attendance Allowance	779	897
Invalid Care Allowance	104	184
Severe Disablement Allowance	285	295
Mobility Allowance	514	596
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit	7,962	7,952
Child Benefit	4,513	4,598
One Parent Benefit	148	163
Family Credit/FIS	161	180
Maternity Grant	14	—
Independent Living Fund	—	—
Motability	1	1
Rate Rebate	1,562	1,677
Rent Allowance	951	1,012
Rent Rebate	2,356	2,461
Community Charge Benefit	—	—

	1988-89	1989-90
Benefit		
Retirement Pension	19,237	20,697
Christmas Bonus-Contributory	109	112
Widows' Benefit	850	852
Unemployment Benefit	1,107	733
Sickness Benefit	192	204
Statutory Sick Pay	898	949
Invalidity Benefit	3,359	3,837
Death Grant	—	—
Industrial Disablement Benefit	451	470
Industrial Death Benefit	59	59
Other II Benefits	4	4
Maternity Allowance	27	30
Maternity Grant	—	—
Statutory Maternity Pay	250	286
Guardian's Allowance/CSA	1	1
Non-contributory RP	36	35
Christmas Bonus-Non-Contributory	9	9

	1988-89	1989-90
War Pension	610	641
Attendance Allowance	1,003	1,159
Invalid Care Allowance	173	184
Severe Disablement Allowance	316	346
Mobility Allowance	675	769
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit	7,575	7,675
Child Benefit	4,515	4,537
One Parent Benefit	179	199
Family Credit/FIS	394	425
Maternity Grant	—	—
Independent Living Fund	1	11
Motability	1	1
Rate Rebate	1,336	1,142
Rent Allowance	1,035	1,171
Rent Rebate	2,565	2,733
Community Charge Benefit	—	190

	1990-91	1991-92
Benefit		
Retirement Pension	22,699	25,538
Christmas Bonus-Contributory	112	114
Widows' Benefit	889	983
Unemployment Benefit	870	1,506
Sickness Benefit	216	268
Statutory Sick Pay	941	724
Invalidity Benefit	4,431	5,255
Death Grant	—	—
Industrial Disablement Benefit	520	600
Industrial Death Benefit	60	65
Other II Benefits	4	4
Maternity Allowance	34	39
Maternity Grant—	—	
Statutory Maternity Pay	314	344
Guardian's Allowance/CSA	2	2
Non-contributory RP	36	37
Christmas Bonus-Non-Contributory	9	8
War Pension	708	805
Attendance Allowance	1,382	1,706
Invalid Care Allowance	208	262
Severe Disablement Allowance	429	583
Mobility Allowance	883	1,061
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit	8,891	11,891
Child Benefit	4,591	5,206
One Parent Benefit	229	247
Family Credit/FIS	494	617
Maternity Grant	—	—
Independent Living Fund	24	54
Motability	1	3
Rate Rebate	—	—
Rent Allowance	1,530	1,976
Rent Rebate	465	583
Community Charge Benefit	2,085	1,228

Note.—1991-92 figures are estimated outturn. Most central Government support for rent rebates appears in the Department of the Environment and Welsh Office programmes in 1990-92, and subsequent years, as rent rebate subsidy in England and Wales and is now paid from local authorities' housing revenue accounts.

Table 3: Expenditure in 1991-92 terms

£ million

	1978-79	1979-80
Benefit		
Retirement Pension	20,487	20,497
Christmas Bonus-Contributory	260	223
Widows' Benefit	1,370	1,309
Unemployment Benefit	1,714	1,518
Sickness Benefit	1,888	1,523
Statutory Sick Pay	—	—
Invalidity Benefit	2,279	2,313
Death Grant	43	37
Industrial Disablement Benefit	586	567
Industrial Death Benefit	87	84
Other II Benefits	14	12
Maternity Allowance	285	291
Maternity Grant	43	37
Statutory Maternity Pay	—	—
Guardian's Allowance/CSA	5	5
Non-contributory RP	100	84
Christmas Bonus—Non-Contributory	14	12
War Pension	922	872
Attendance Allowance	456	467
Invalid Care Allowance	11	9
Severe Disablement Allowance	187	198
Mobility Allowance	128	184
Income Support/Support Benefit	6,120	5,664
Child Benefit	4,818	6,480
One Parent Benefit	60	100
Family Credit/FIS	65	63
Maternity Grant	43	37
Independent Living Fund	—	—
Motability	—	—
Rate Rebate	448	467
Rent Allowance	103	93
Rent Rebate	562	553
Community Charge Benefit	—	—

	1980-81	1981-82
Benefit		
Retirement Pension	20,682	21,728
Christmas Bonus-Contributory	193	181
Widows' Benefit	1,254	1,238
Unemployment Benefit	2,515	3,050
Sickness Benefit	1,285	1,218
Statutory Sick Pay	—	—
Invalidity Benefit	2,260	2,455
Death Grant	31	30
Industrial Disablement Benefit	554	564
Industrial Death Benefit	83	84
Other II Benefits	10	9
Maternity Allowance	293	283
Maternity Grant	31	29
Statutory Maternity Pay	—	—
Guardian's Allowance/CSA	4	4
Non-contributory RP	75	70
Christmas Bonus-Non-Contributory	10	11
War Pension	833	858
Attendance Allowance	511	591
Invalid Care Allowance	10	11
Severe Disablement Allowance	212	233
Mobility Allowance	246	310
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit	6,232	8,672
Child Benefit	5,784	6,042
One Parent Benefit	120	136
Family Credit/FIS	83	118
Maternity Grant	31	29
Independent Living Fund	—	—
Motability	—	—
Rate Rebate	532	683
Rent Allowance	94	116
Rent Rebate	623	891
Community Charge Benefit	—	—

	1982-83	1983-84
Benefit		
Retirement Pension	22,663	23,360
Christmas Bonus-Contributory	171	165
Widows' Benefit	1,213	1,233
Unemployment Benefit	2,509	2,393
Sickness Benefit	927	424
Statutory Sick Pay	—	—
Invalidity Benefit	2,665	2,993
Death Grant	28	27
Industrial Disablement Benefit	574	590
Industrial Death Benefit	85	86
Other II Benefits	8	8
Maternity Allowance	254	225
Maternity Grant	27	27
Statutory Maternity Pay	—	—
Guardian's Allowance/CSA	3	3

	1982-83	1983-84
Non-contributory RP	67	66
Christmas Bonus—Non-Contributory	10	10
War Pension	843	838
Attendance Allowance	674	791
Invalid Care Allowance	13	16
Severe Disablement Allowance	258	291
Mobility Allowance	395	486
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit	10,473	8,938
Child Benefit (Children)	6,122	6,375
One Parent Benefit	152	171
Family Credit/FIS	157	197
Maternity Grant	27	27
Independent Living Fund	—	—
Motability	—	—
Rate Rebate	920	1,950
Rent Allowance	124	857
Rent Rebate	1,554	3,165
Community Charge Benefit	—	—

Benefit	1984-85	1985-86
Retirement Pension	23,244	23,928
Christmas Bonus—Contributory	160	151
Widows' Benefit	1,195	1,154
Unemployment Benefit	2,402	2,293
Sickness Benefit	425	398
Statutory Sick Pay	773	786
Invalidity Benefit	3,261	3,389
Death Grant	26	26
Industrial Disablement Benefit	580	587
Industrial Death Benefit	84	84
Other II Benefits	8	7
Maternity Allowance	245	237
Maternity Grant	27	25
Statutory Maternity Pay	—	—
Guardian's Allowance/CSA	3	1
Non-contributory RP	59	59
Christmas Bonus—Non-Contributory	9	10
War Pension	828	838
Attendance Allowance	877	990
Invalid Care Allowance	17	19
Severe Disablement Allowance	359	384
Mobility Allowance	542	609
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit	9,810	10,644
Child Benefit	6,510	6,446
One Parent Benefit	183	193
Family Credit/FIS	192	188
Maternity Grant	27	25
Independent Living Fund	—	—
Motability	—	—
Rate Rebate	1,965	2,081
Rent Allowance	982	1,143
Rent Rebate	3,144	3,210
Community Charge Benefit	—	—

Benefit	1986-87	1987-88
Retirement Pension	24,835	24,705
Christmas Bonus—Contributory	149	142
Widows' Benefit	1,152	1,112
Unemployment Benefit	2,422	1,945
Sickness Benefit	250	256
Statutory Sick Pay	1,057	1,113
Invalidity Benefit	3,734	3,932
Death Grant	25	4
Industrial Disablement Benefit	615	600
Industrial Death Benefit	85	74
Other II Benefits	6	5
Maternity Allowance	235	68
Maternity Grant	20	—
Statutory Maternity Pay	—	256
Guardian's Allowance/CSA	3	1
Non-contributory RP	52	49
Christmas Bonus—Non-Contributory	11	12
War Pension	824	794

	1986-87	1987-88
Attendance Allowance	1,088	1,188
Invalid Care Allowance	145	244
Severe Disablement Allowance	398	391
Mobility Allowance	718	790
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit	11,122	10,535
Child Benefit	6,304	6,092
One Parent Benefit	207	216
Family Credit/FIS	225	238
Maternity Grant	20	—
Independent Living Fund	—	—
Motability	1	1
Rate Rebate	2,182	2,222
Rent Allowance	1,328	1,341
Rent Rebate	3,291	3,260
Community Charge Benefit	—	—

Benefit	1988-89	1989-90
Retirement Pension	23,778	24,025
Christmas Bonus—Contributory	135	130
Widows' Benefit	1,051	989
Unemployment Benefit	1,368	851
Sickness Benefit	237	237
Statutory Sick Pay	1,110	1,102
Invalidity Benefit	4,152	4,454
Death Grant	—	—
Industrial Disablement Benefit	557	546
Industrial Death Benefit	73	68
Other II Benefits	5	5
Maternity Allowance	33	35
Maternity Grant	—	—
Statutory Maternity Pay	309	332
Guardian's Allowance/CSA	1	1
Non-contributory RP	44	41
Christmas Bonus-Non-Contributory	11	10
War Pension	754	744
Attendance Allowance	1,240	1,345
Invalid Care Allowance	214	214
Severe Disablement Allowance	391	402
Mobility Allowance	834	893
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit	9,363	8,909
Child Benefit	5,581	5,266
One Parent Benefit	221	231
Family Credit/FIS	487	493
Maternity Grant	—	—
Independent Living Fund	1	13
Motability	1	1
Rate Rebate	1,651	1,326
Rent Allowance	1,279	1,359
Rent Rebate	3,171	3,172
Community Charge Benefit	—	221

Benefit	1990-91	1991-92
Retirement Pension	24,288	25,538
Christmas Bonus—Contributory	120	114
Widows' Benefit	951	983
Unemployment Benefit	931	1,506
Sickness Benefit	231	268
Statutory Sick Pay	1,007	724
Invalidity Benefit	4,741	5,255
Death Grant	—	—
Industrial Disablement Benefit	556	600
Industrial Death Benefit	64	65
Other II Benefits	4	4
Maternity Allowance	36	39
Maternity Grant	—	—
Statutory Maternity Pay	336	344
Guardian's Allowance/CSA	2	2
Non-contributory RP	39	37
Christmas Bonus—Non-Contributory	10	8
War Pension	758	805
Attendance Allowance	1,479	1,706
Invalid Care Allowance	232	262
Severe Disablement Allowance	459	583

	1990-91	1991-92
Mobility Allowance	945	1,061
Income Support/Supplementary Benefit	9,513	11,8911
Child Benefit	4,912	5,206
One Parent Benefit	245	247
Family Credit/FIS	529	617
Maternity Grant	—	—
Independent Living Fund	26	54
Motability	1	3
Rate Rebate	—	—
Rent Allowance	1,637	1,976
Rent Rebate	498	583
Community Charge Benefit	2,231	1,228

War Pensions Scheme

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest position regarding discussions to simplify the war pensions scheme.

Miss Widdecombe: Proposals for simplifying the war pensions scheme and improving its administration were discussed with the war pensions central advisory committee on 5 December 1991. Its response was broadly to welcome the thrust of the proposed changes. Final decisions will be made and announced after consideration of the many detailed comments is completed. We have previously indicated that resources available to the war pensions scheme and individual cash entitlements of war pensioners will not be reduced as a result. That remains the position.

Income Support

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many income support claimants who work between 16 and 24 hours a week currently *(a)* receive direct help with mortgage interest payments and *(b)* are eligible to apply to the social fund for help with the cost of furniture and other essential household items; and if he will subdivide the figures into childless, couples with children, and lone parent household categories;

(2) whether income support claimaints who work between 16 and 24 hours a week and who currently *(a)* receive direct help with mortgage interest payments and *(b)* are eligible to apply to the social fund for help with the cost of furniture and other items will have their eligibility for assistance fully protected after April 1992 by special protection arrangements.

Miss Widdecombe: We estimate that around 15,000 people currently receiving income support and working between 16 and 24 hours a week are receiving help with mortgage interest payments. Because of the small size of the sample, it is not possible to subdivide this number into household categories. Anyone receiving income support, whether or not they are working, is eligible to apply to the social fund for help under the normal rules.

People whose entitlement to income support is protected when the hours rule changes from 24 to 16 a week from 7 April will have the same rights to help with their mortgage interest payments and to apply for social fund payments as they do at present.

Business Reply Envelopes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of DSS agency offices have withdrawn business reply envelopes; how many people were affected by the withdrawal of business reply envelopes; and what are the estimated savings for the agency in the year 1992-93 from the withdrawal of these envelopes.

Miss Widdecombe: Customer services are a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Independent Tribunal Service

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what influence the president of the Independent Tribunal Service has over allocation of resources from the DSS; to whom the president is accountable; and to whom complaints about dissatisfaction about the administrative arrangements of the independent Tribunal Service may be addressed.

Miss Widdecombe: The president of the Independent Tribunal Service, his honour Judge Holden, is appointed by the Lord Chancellor. He may appoint such officers and staff as he thinks fit to carry out his statutory duties, with the consent of the Secretary of State and the Treasury as to numbers, remuneration and other terms and conditions of service. In using the resources so provided he is accountable to the departmental accounting officer. Complaints about dissatisfaction with the administrative arrangements of the Independent Tribunal Service should be addressed to the president, his honour Judge Holden.

Mirror Group Pension Fund

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the cost of underwriting the guaranteed minimum pension for the Mirror Group pension fund; and if he has agreed to underwrite the guaranteed minimum pension for the Mirror Group pension fund.

Miss Widdecombe: It is too early to make any assessment of the possible costs involved. Existing legislation provides protection for those members of pension schemes who have been contracted out of the state earnings related pensions scheme (SERPS) introduced in 1978. If any scheme is wound up there is a statutory provision designed to protect the guaranteed minimum pension which contracted out schemes are required to provide.

Personal Pensions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest information available on the level of earnings of people with personal pensions.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest available information for the year ended April 1990 is that the average pay of appropriate personal pension holders, including those in part-time work, is £9,740.

Pension Contributions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the protocol to the treaty of Rome deeming pension contributions paid before May 1990 not to be deferred pay in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands includes employee pension contributions which are deducted from the employee's pay packet or salary.

Mr. Jack: The protocol to article 119 of the treaty of Rome, agreed at Maastricht, will, when ratified, apply to all member states and relates to benefits under occupational social security schemes attributable to periods of employment prior to 17 May 1990.

Contributions to occupational pension schemes before 17 May 1990 will continue to qualify scheme members for benefits on the same basis as when their contributions were made.

Pensions (Christmas Bonus)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the rationale for paying the Christmas bonus to people in receipt of their pension in the week commencing 2 December and excluding those whose pensions were first payable in the Christmas week.

Miss Widdecombe: Since the Christmas bonus was introduced in 1972 the practice has been to make payments to those who qualify no later than the first week in December. This ensures the bonus reaches all 12 million recipients in time for Christmas.

Benefits (Expenditure)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the spending on *(a)* disabled people's benefits and *(b)* retired people's benefit in (i) 1979-80, (ii) 1983-84, (iii) 1987-88 and (iv) 1991-92 at September 1991 prices.

Mr. Scott: Total benefit spending on long-term sick and disabled people and on elderly people, in cash and in 1991-92 prices, is given in the table.

	Disabled people		*Elderly people*	
	Cash	*1991-92 prices*	*Cash*	*1991-92 prices*
	£ million	*£ million*	*£ million*	*£ million*
1979-80	2·1	4·9	10·1	23·6
1983-84	4·1	6·6	17·7	28·2
1987-88	6·7	8·8	23·1	30·5
1991-92	12·3	12·3	31·4	31·4

Note: 1991-92 figures are estimated outturn.

Income Support Disability Premium

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ensure that all claimants in receipt of attendance allowance or the new disability housing allowance are informed that their benefit acts as a passport to the income support disability premium.

Mr. Scott: When customers are awarded either attendance allowance or disability living allowance they will receive an information sheet with their award notice explaining that if they are on income support they may be able to get more money because of their disability, or indeed that they may now qualify for income support if they did not get it previously. More fundamentally, we are introducing special procedures so that income support entitlement can be reassessed automatically following the award of either attendance allowance or disability living allowance.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women who will lose in real terms as a result of the freezing of statutory sick pay for 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not available and cannot be accurately estimated. Over 90 per cent. of employees work for employers with occupational sick pay (OSP) schemes and will have their statutory sick pay (SSP) topped up by OSP. The 1988 survey of occupational sick pay schemes found that the majority of employers with such schemes top up SSP to full pay. Most employees affected by the freezing of the higher rate of SSP will, therefore, have experienced no reduction in the amount they received when sick. Those employees on the lower rate have had their SSP entitlement fully protected by full retail prices index increases.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the total savings to the Exchequer for each year as a result of freezing higher rate statutory sick pay in 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Scott: The total estimated savings are:

	£ million
1991-92	67
1992-93	89

Pensioners (Home Owners)

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of pensioners are owner occupiers and have paid off their mortgage.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest figures available show that in 1988, 50 per cent. of pensioners were owner occupiers, of whom 46 per cent. owned their homes outright. This compares well with 1979, when only 38 per cent. owned their homes outright.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teachers, North Yorkshire

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will show the full-time equivalent number of teachers employed in *(a)* north Yorkshire infant and primary schools and *(b)* north Yorkshire secondary schools in each year from 1974 to 1991.

Mr. Fallon: The full-time equivalent number of qualified teachers in maintained primary and secondary schools in North Yorkshire local education authority in January of each year is shown in the following table.

Full-time equivalent of qualified teachers in maintained primary and secondary schools in North Yorkshire Local Education Authority—January 1974-1991.

(thousands)

	Primary[1]	*Secondary*
1974	2·6	2·7
1975	2·7	2·8
1976	2·7	2·9
1977	2·7	3·1

	Primary[1]	Secondary
1978	2·7	3·1
1979	2·7	3·2
1980	2·6	3·2
1981	2·5	3·2
1982	2·4	3·2
1983	2·3	3·2
1984	2·3	3·2
1985	2·3	3·1
1986	2·3	3·0
1987	2·3	2·9
1988	2·4	2·9
1989	2·4	2·8
1990	2·5	2·8
1991	2·4	2·8

[1] Includes infant schools.

Pupil Expenditure

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the expenditure per pupil in the county of Shropshire in 1978-79, 1982-83, 1986-87 and 1991-92.

Mr. Fallon: The latest year for which actual spending information is available in 1989-90. Shropshire local education authority's school-based expenditure per nursery, primary and secondary school pupil is shown in the table. The real terms increase in per pupil spending between 1978-79 and 1989-90 was 56 per cent.

Net institutional expenditure[1] per pupil[2]
Nursery, primary and secondary schools

Year	Current prices	1989-90 prices[3]
	£	£
1978-79	405	940
1982-83	765	1,100
1986-87	1,070	1,290
1989-90	1,470	1,470

Notes to table
[1] Net institutional expenditure covers the direct costs in schools of salaries and wages, premises and certain supplies and services. It does not include the cost of school meals, home to school transport, LEA central administration, and financing costs of capital expenditure.
[2] The figures are derived from Shropshire local education authority's returns of its spending to the Department of the Environment and of its pupil numbers to the Department of Education and Science.
[3] Figures for 1978-79, 1982-83 and 1986-87 have been repriced to 1989-90 prices using the GDP (Market Prices) Deflator Index.

Sixth Forms

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the total number of school sixth forms in England in *(a)* 1979-80 and *(b)* on the latest available figures.

Mr. Eggar: The numbers of maintained secondary schools with sixth forms in England, in 1980 and 1991 were 2,487 and 1,998 respectively. These figures include sixth form colleges in England.

Teachers' Superannuation

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answers of 11 December, *Official Report*, column *448-49* and 2 December, *Official Report*, column *16* on the teachers' superannuation scheme, what is the basis for paying widowers' pensions in respect of service from 6 April 1988 and charging extra for the optional cover from 1 April 1972 to 5 April 1988 when widows' pensions are paid on all service from 1 April 1972.

Mr. Fallon: The normal contribution rate, of which an individual teacher pays 6 per cent. of salary and his or her employer the balance, is determined by the Government Actuary in his quinquennial valuations of the scheme. For the period 1 April 1972 to 5 April 1988, the Government Actuary took into account the cost of providing widows' pensions as a benefit of the scheme but not widowers' pensions and the normal contribution rate reflected this. In his most recent valuation, the actuary has taken account of the fact that widowers' benefits are now provided by the scheme with effect from 6 April 1988. Widowers' benefits prior to 6 April 1988 have not been covered by the contributions already paid by teachers and employers and on that basis the arrangements set out in my answer of 2 December were introduced.

A-levels, Islington

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to publish the report of Her Majesty's inspectorate in relation to the inspection carried out in November of the Islington sixth form centre and the two Islington further education colleges; and what was the finding of this report in relation to the proportion of A-level passes as compared with the national average.

Mr. Eggar: The report from HM inspectorate is shortly to be received by my right hon. and learned Friend, once received, it will be published as quickly as possible. When the report is published I will write to the hon. Member with the information on A-level passes.

School Meals

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the number of children entitled to free school meals in each year since 1979.

Mr. Fallon: Since the implementation of the 1986 Social Security Act in 1988, only children whose families are in receipt of income support and those children who are themselves eligible for income support are entitled to receive free school meals. Prior to this local authorities had discretionary powers to provide free school meals and a variety of schemes existed. Consequently, it is not possible to give the number of children entitled to free meals before this date.

A total of 821,373 free school meals were taken in maintained schools in England on the census date in January 1991.

Sport

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the chairmanships of the proposed United Kingdom Sports Commission and the Sports Council for England.

Mr. Atkins: As announced on 19 December 1991 in the policy statement "Sport and Active Recreation", the Government intend to replace the Sports Council of Great Britain with a United Kingdom sports commission and a sports council for England, subject to the approval by the Queen in Council, of the royal charters for the new bodies.

My right hon. and learned Friend intends to appoint Peter Yarranton as chairman of the United Kingdom sports commission, and Ian Beer as chairman of the sports council for England. Mr. Yarranton is presently chairman of the Sports Council of Great Britain. He has agreed to continue in that capacity until the transition to the new arrangements has been effected.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Political Talks

4. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress of talks between the political parties of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan).

19. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what further steps he proposes to take in respect in respect of new political initiatives in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

25. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his current efforts to bring about a political settlement in the Province.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan).

Security

15. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the recently elected Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland on security issues.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, the Minister of State and I held a meeting with the new Taoiseach, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister of Justice yesterday, during which a range of security and other issues were discussed. I shall be meeting the Irish Foreign Affairs and Justice Ministers again at a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference which will be held shortly.

20. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the security situation.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Sir P. Duffy).

24. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a further statement on the security situation in the Province.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Sir P. Duffy).

Brook Advisory Clinic

16. **Miss Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will visit the newly opened Brook advisory clinic in Belfast to discuss funding.

Mr. Hanley: I understand that the Belfast Brook centre has not yet, in fact, been opened. As the Eastern health and social services board is responsible for the funding of the services to be provided by the Brook centre when operational, it would not be appropriate for either my right hon. Friend or I to enter into separate discussions with the centre on this matter.

Industrial Development Board

17. **Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the achievements to date of the Industrial Development Board in targeting new jobs.

Mr. Needham: During the six-year period from 1 April 1985 to 31 March 1991, 27,583 jobs were promoted by the IDB against a target of 32,435.

Local Management of Schools

18. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many schools have devolved budgets under the local management of schools arrangements; how many schools are grant maintained; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: In Northern Ireland 237 schools and 24 colleges of further education have fully delegated budgets and 1,050 have partially delegated budgets under LMS and LMC arrangements. There are no grant-maintained schools.

Tourist Board

21. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will appoint a new chief executive of the Northern Ireland tourist board.

Mr. Needham: The appointment of a chief executive is a matter for the Northern Ireland tourist board. I understand, however, from the chairman of the board that the post was recently advertised, with a closing date for receipt of applications on 2 March 1992.

Buses

22. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has visited plants in Northern Ireland producing buses.

Mr. Needham: I visited Walter Alexander and Co. (Belfast) Limited's bus body building plant at Newtownabbey on 1 November 1990. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State visited Robert Wright and Son (Coachworks) Ltd. at Balleymena on 19 June 1990.

Rural Development

23. **Mr. Dover:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made towards encouraging rural development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Following the report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Rural Development in 1991 an independent Rural Development Council, representing a wide spectrum of rural interests has been established to provide advice and resources to rural communities to help them develop multi-sectoral regeneration plans for their local areas.

Within the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland a rural development policy division has also been set up and three rural development area co-ordinators at senior level have been appointed to provide integrated statutory responses to local community plans.

Museums

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what plans he has to provide funding for museums in Northern Ireland other than those he already funds;

(2) what plans he has to publish a policy statement for museums in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: There are no immediate plans to extend funding to local authority museums, other than those to meet half of the cost of any improvement grant which may be awarded by the museums and galleries improvement fund, a joint venture between Government and the Wolfson charity trust.

Future policy for the support of local authority museums in Northern Ireland will be considered following the publication, later this year, of a report by the Northern Ireland museums advisory committee of its study into the feasibility of establishing an area museum service for the Province.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met the Irish Museums Association in Ireland to discuss the role and funding of museums in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has never met the Irish Museums Association.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the budgetary allocation to museums in Northern Ireland in each of the financial years from 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1991 inclusive.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is as follows:

	1988-89 £	*1989-90* £	*1990-91* £
Ulster Museum	2,876,400	3,529,300	4,136,000
Ulster Folk and Transport Museum	2,124,300	2,364,700	2,747,300
Ulster American Folk Park	685,000	641,000	792,800

Community Services

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the amount allocated to each district council in Northern Ireland for community services in the financial years from 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1991.

Dr. Mawhinney: The amounts allocated were as follows:

Recurrent funding

Council	*1988-89* £	*1989-90* £	*1990-91* £
Antrim	46,275	47,700	50,175
Ards	33,675	34,650	36,450
Armagh	16,800	19,275	20,250
Ballymena	53,625	55,200	58,125
Ballymoney	6,675	6,900	7,275
Banbridge	15,750	17,250	18,150
Belfast	679,125	685,350	717,000
Carrickfergus	37,875	39,000	41,100
Castlereagh	83,700	83,700	88,125
Coleraine	30,150	31,050	32,700
Cookstown	6,000	7,500	7,875
Craigavon	172,275	172,275	181,500
Derry	112,350	115,500	121,575
Down	30,975	33,750	35,550
Dungannon	7,725	9,825	10,350
Fermanagh	36,375	37,500	39,450
Larne	19,425	22,275	23,475
Limavady	15,375	15,750	16,575
Lisburn	61,950	63,825	67,200
Magherafelt	4,725	4,725	5,025
Moyle	14,100	14,550	15,300
Newry and Mourne	85,950	88,500	93,150
Newtownabbey	51,600	54,750	57,750
North Down	44,475	46,500	48,975
Omagh	56,175	61,950	65,250
Strabane	66,375	72,750	76,650
Total	1,789,500	1,842,000	1,935,000

Capital Funding

Council			
Antrim	38,836	6,052	Nil
Ards	39,667	21,448	26,860
Armagh	32,872	Nil	86,182
Ballymena	99,697	nil	17,213
Ballymoney	20,537	11,145	985
Banbridge	1,706	33,680	2,784
Belfast	144,423	20,618	3,405
Carrickfergus	nil	nil	nil
Castlereagh	32,531	nil	4,866
Coleraine	106,745	26,422	5,838
Cookstown	65,580	nil	nil
Craigavon	63,697	49,415	6,443
Derry	104,378	162,820	125,688
Down	38,332	5,109	25,064
Dungannon	59,521	3,376	44,770
Fermanagh	nil	4,535	nil
Larne	151,375	177	517
Limavady	17,903	7,085	5,770
Lisburn	43,005	61,376	18,957
Magherafelt	26,408	6,841	517
Moyle	9,895	nil	nil
Newry and Mourne	100,146	34,834	13,505
Newtownabbey	nil	7,598	nil
North Down	18,199	2,776	18,586
Omagh	26,940	8,308	35,919
Strabane	38,734	65,435	nil
Total	281,127	539,050	443,869

Notes:

1. Capital cost figures cover both community and recreation facility provision.
2. Grants made to councils are made in respect of expenditure on individual approved projects.

Government Offices (Relocation)

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to relocate central Government offices into the constituency of South Down in response to the provision of the Star telecommunications network within the area.

Dr. Mawhinney: The location or relocation of civil service work is considered whenever a new function emerges, an existing function changes its organisational structure, or when the lease of a civil service occupied building expires. The provision of good communication links, such as those now available under the STAR telecommunications network, is just one of a number of factors which are taken into account when deciding upon relocation options.

There are no plans at present to relocate any central Government functions to the South Down constituency.

South Eastern Education and Library Board

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he is currently considering from South Eastern education and library board in respect of a headquarters on a single site.

Dr. Mawhinney: The South Eastern board is currently reviewing the options for locating its headquarters on a single site. The Department of Education is awaiting the outcome of these investigations before entering into further discussions with the board.

Earnings

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women in each region earn (i) above and (ii) below the national insurance lower earnings limit; and how many are between the lower earnings limit and the upper earnings limit, in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: Northern Ireland is regarded as a single region for national insurance purposes. The information requested is as follows. The figures refer to the latest estimates for the current year.

	Men	*Women*
Number of people who earn above lower earnings limit	245,000	185,000
Number of people who earn below lower earnings limit	25,000	65,000
Number of people who earn between upper and lower earnings limit	200,000	180,000

Pensioners

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the latest estimates of how many pensioners are *(a)* male, *(b)* female, *(c)* single and *(d)* married in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: In mid-1990 the estimated numbers of men and women at state pension age and over in Northern Ireland were as follows:

	Number
Men	76,000
Women	155,000

Source: OPCS mid-year estimates.

I regret that information is not available on the marital status of these pensioners.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pensioners there are over the age of 75 years divided into males and females; and what is *(a)* their average income from all sources and *(b)* the income distribution of such pensioners, in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 24 February 1992]:* In mid-1990 the estimated numbers of men and women over the age of 75 in Northern Ireland were as follows:

	Number
Men	28,000
Women	54,000

Source: OPCS mid-year estimates.

I regret that sufficient information is not available to enable reliable estimates of the average income or income distribution of these men and women to be made.

Social Security Fraud

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is his estimate of the cost of social security fraud to his Department of Health and Social Services in each of the last five years;

(2) how many people have been jailed as a result of being found guilty of social security fraud in each of the last five years;

(3) how many people were charged with social security fraud in each of the last five years.

Mr. Hanley: Social security operational matters are the responsibility of Mr. Alec Wylie, chief executive of the Social Security Agency. He will write to the hon. Gentleman and copies of his reply will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Butchers' Blocks

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what requirements have been introduced by the European Community in connection with the butcher's wooden block upon which cuts of meat are prepared; and if he will make a statement on the future of this butcher's block.

Mr. Hanley: None. A proposed European Community directive on hygiene of foodstuffs presently under negotiation, would require that all articles, fittings, and equipment with which food comes into contact should be so constructed, be of such materials and be kept in such good order, repair and condition as to prevent, so far as is reasonably practical, any risk of contamination of the food. Similar provisions are already contained in existing United Kingdom food hygiene law.

Fisheries Patrol Boat

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the acquisition cost and what are the budgeted running costs of the Northern Ireland fisheries patrol boat, Ken Vickers.

Mr. Hanley: The acquisition cost was some £450,000, 50 per cent. of which will be met by the EC. The estimated running costs, including crewing, for 1992-93 are £72,400.

Citizens Charter

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the cost to date of the preparation, printing, publication and distribution of the citizens charter for Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: A total of £120,400.

Low Energy Lighting

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make it his policy progressively to introduce low-energy lighting in all the buildings operated by his Department.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 25 February 1992]:* Low-energy light fittings are already used in all new installations and to replace fittings which have reached the end of their useful life. In other circumstances low-energy units are fitted where it is cost-effective to do so.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Captive Birds

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further information he has on the levels of mortality in imported captive birds.

Mr. Gummer: The third report by the Ministry on mortalities in imported captive birds, relating to imports in 1990, shows that of 176,000 birds, 3,500 were dead on arrival and a further 18,100 died in post-import quarantine. The average mortality remains unacceptable but has fallen slightly to 12·3 per cent. compared with 12·7 per cent. in the previous year. The statistics give further evidence of the major problems in the bird trade which the Government are taking vigorous action to address. I am placing copies of the report in the Library of the House.

The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), has just announced a far-reaching package of measures which underline our commitment. Clearly these issues need to be addressed internationally, and at the forthcoming Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species conference the United Kingdom will take a leading role in pressing for strengthened international controls. We are also seeking tough action in the European Community. We are determined that any future trade in wild birds should be conducted under proper conditions and that exporting countries, airlines and traders should all play their part and recognise their responsibilities for ensuring the highest standards of care.

Ministerial Appointments

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all the public bodies to which he makes appointments and all the committees within his Ministry which include outside experts appointed by him.

Mr. Gummer: Information about public bodies to which I make appointments is given in "Public Appointments: a Handbook for Women's Organisations" and annually in "Public Bodies", copies of which are in the Library. To provide a fully comprehensive list of all bodies and committees to which I make appointments would be disproportionately expensive.

Oilseed Harvest

Mr. Hague: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what EC support arrangements will apply in the United Kingdom for the 1992 oilseed harvest.

Mr. Gummer: A new EC support system is being introduced because the existing arrangements were found to be incompatible with GATT rules. The scheme will apply to rapeseed, sunflower seed and soya bean crops harvested in summer 1992. The scheme will provide a payment related to the world price made at a flat rate per hectare and paid direct to growers.

The agriculture departments will be operating the scheme and will issue explanatory booklets and application forms as soon as possible. These will be sent to all known oilseed growers. Others will be able to obtain copies from the Ministry's regional service centres and the offices of other agriculture departments. I will place copies in the Libraries of the House.

The general rules of the scheme were adopted in December 1991 in council regulation 3766/91. A Commission regulation establishing more detailed rules is expected to be published shortly. When it is, I will make a further announcement. Growers sowing seed after the entry into force of the Commission regulation (three days after the date of its publication in the *Official Journal*) will be subject to certain restrictions on the land on which they may sow if they are to be eligible for aid. They will only be eligible if they plant on arable land. That is defined in the Council regulation as

"land cultivated during the period 1989-90 to 1990-91, including land shown to have been fallowed in conformity with a publicly funded scheme, temporarily under grass as part of an arable rotation or exceptionally arable land fallowed throughout this period".

The intention of this provision is to prevent the ploughing up of permanent grassland.

In addition to crops harvested from certified seed, home-saved seed will be eligible for aid, as will seed grown for industrial use and seed grown for sowing. Various requirements in relation to these matters, which are laid down in the Commission regulation, are being waived this year because it would be inequitable to apply them after growers have taken decisions on what seed to sow for the 1992 harvest. Specific obligations will however apply in future years, and these will be publicised in advance of growers' decisions on plantings for 1993 harvest.

Growers' completed applications must be received by the agriculture departments by 30 May. The Commission regulation provides for applications received in the following 30 days to suffer a 1 per cent. cut in the aid for each day that they are late up to a maximum cut of 30 per cent. of the aid. Applications received thereafter will be ineligible for any aid. Applications must be supported by a map—from the 1:10,000 Ordnance Survey series, or a map of an equivalent quality—showing the precise location of the crops.

After growers' applications have been checked, a first payment (of up to 50 per cent. of the total) will be made by 30 September. After the grower has submitted a "harvest declaration", further checks will be made.

The remainder of the aid will be paid by the end of March 1993. There will also be some payments, on which the Commission has not yet made a proposal, to growers who hold the crop off the market, and thus help to ensure orderly marketing.

Different rates of aid will be paid in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, to reflect their different average yields. Last autumn's and this spring's sowings will receive the same rate of aid. This may change for 1993 crop.

The regulations contain a number of measures designed to penalise inaccurate applications and to prevent fraud. Penalties for fraud can include disqualification from support in the year following the committal of certain offences. A statutory instrument will be introduced providing in particular for powers of entry and inspection.

This scheme is free-standing. There is no linked set-aside requirement, nor is there any simplified scheme for small producers.

Dietary Supplements

Mr. Hague: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on future controls on dietary supplements.

Mr. Gummer: In March last year the Government published a report by officials from the Department of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on dietary supplements and health foods. The report was not a statement of policy but was intended to provide a basis for discussion. It was circulated to some 160 trade, consumer and other organisations for comment. Last December the European Commission issued a discussion paper on possible future controls on dietary supplements which covered much of the same ground as our earlier report. Views on the Commission paper were invited from all those who had commented on our report.

In the light of all the comments that we have received on the two documents we have concluded that there is a good case for the introduction of some specific controls on dietary supplements. However, we believe that a balance needs to be struck between on the one hand ensuring public health together with clear labelling information and, on the other hand, maintaining the availability of safe products for which there is clearly a strong public demand.

We have recently submitted our views on future legislation to the European Commission in the form of an outline draft directive on dietary supplements. I have arranged for copies of the draft to be sent to all those who responded to the consultation exercises and to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

At this stage we are only seeking to establish the broad framework for a directive. Regulatory regimes for supplements differ considerably throughout the Community and it will be important to settle questions of principle before we move on to more technical matters.

I understand that the Commission is due to hold a preliminary discussion on dietary supplements in early March. We will continue to keep all the interests involved informed on the progress of these discussions and will be consulting further on particular detailed issues such as the maximum daily dose limits which might be laid down for individual supplements.

Adulterated Wine

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has about adulterated Italian wine on sale in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: My Department learnt on 11 February that some imported Italian wines had been illegally contaminated.

AS soon as the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food became aware of the potential problem, Ministry officials drew together United Kingdom trade interests and the Italian authorities to discuss the illegal addition of methylisothiocyanate to those Italian wines. Meetings of all parties concerned were held last week and again this week. A list of all producers known to have been using this chemical has been obtained from the Italian Government and we have identified nine importers in the United Kingdom. They have all been notified of the need to implement a full recall of suspect wines and to submit samples for analysis and have co-operated fully with my Department. Details of those wines have also been sent to local authorities and to environmental health officers to enable them to check that no stock remains on sale, including at minor outlets, hotels and restaurants. Territorial departments and the port health authorities have been similarly notified. In addition we have asked the trade to put in hand immediate testing of all Italian wines to confirm that no other supplies are affected. Independent checking is also being undertaken by the Ministry. We have asked for all test data to be sent to us for incorporation into a comprehensive data base and those results will be made available to the public. Should any further cases of contamination be discovered, immediate steps will be taken to ensure that affected supplies are immediately withdrawn from sale.

Our officials have expressed serious concern to the Italian authorities about this incident and are engaged in further discussions to clarify the extent of the problem, how it arose and what steps are being taken in Italy to ensure that no further adulterated wine is placed on the market.

Fish Conservation

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a further statement on the recent agreement of EC fisheries Ministers for the conservation of fish stocks.

Mr. Gummer *[pursuant to the reply, 6 February 1992 column 275]:* Fishing effort in Europe exceeds what the stocks can at present withstand. Some commercially important species are under severe pressure. Significant steps have already been taken at Community and national level, including the technical measures that will take effect later this year. But more than this is needed if our conservation policies are to be fully effective.

My colleagues in the other Fisheries Departments share this concern. We have looked at a wide range of options. It has not been easy to identify the best way forward. Conservationist have concentrated on their fears for the future of the stocks, while the fishing industry has continued to press strongly for a decommissioning grant scheme. The Government have made clear that this could be considered, but only as part of a package that would have to make a definite contribution to the conservation of fish stocks. Our key objective must be to reduce fishing effort if we are to protect the stocks for fishermen today and their children tomorrow.

My right hon. Friends and I therefore now propose to introduce a programme of closely-linked measures. The objective will be to reduce fishing effort over the period up

to 1996, to meet a target which we shall need to quantify and agree with the Commission in line with our Community obligation under the 1992-1996 multi-annual guidance programme. An essential feature of our programme will be control over fishing effort, through the introduction of a freeze in 1993 to hold effort at its 1991 level, followed in the years 1994 to 1996 by arrangements to reduce entitlements to days at sea to the extent necessary to achieve the overall target. In assessing the size of these reductions, account will be taken of the impact on fishing effort of the other measures described here.

It is our intention to seek to have effort control arrangements in place for 1993. Once this is done, we can bring forward measures to reduce capacity. There will be a decommissioning scheme to operate over two years, with provision for expenditure of up to £25 million. The scheme will be cash limited and subject to tight controls and will be designed to take out the maximum amount of fishing effort. No decommissioning payments will be committed until measures for controlling and reducing fishing effort are in place.

In the meanwhile, the producer organisations established under Community rules to which many fishermen belong will be encouraged to play a more active part in rationalising the structure of the fleet, and certain changes in rules will be made to facilitate that.

Also, the rules governing transfer of vessel licences will be amended so that the existing amount by which capacity has to be reduced on aggregation will be increased, and a penalty will be applied to other forms of transfer too.

To complement these measures to reduce effort and capacity, restrictive licensing will be extended to vessels 10 metres and below in length so that this sector of the fleet cannot expand further. This change will take effect in 1993 but in principle licences will then be issued only to vessels which are already actively involved in fishing now. My Department is making a separate more detailed announcement on this.

Finally, in relation to effort controls provision will be made for fishermen to trade their days at sea entitlements along with fishing licences. This will help the industry to adjust to effort restrictions through rationalisation.

We have begun discussions with the Commission on ways in which these measures could be accommodated in Community legislation and we shall be consulting the Commission and the industry about the details of this important conservation package. When parliamentary time permits the Government will introduce the primary legislation which will be needed for some elements of this package such as the trading arrangements described above.

My right hon. Friends and I believe that a package on these lines will greatly assist the conservation of fish stocks, and will thus be in the best long-term interest of our fishermen. We look forward to constructive discussion of this package with the industry.

SCOTLAND

Insulin

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many representations he has received *(a)* in favour of and *(b)* against issuing needles for insulin-injecting pens on prescription to diabetics during the current session; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he intends to provide needles for insulin-injecting pens on prescription for diabetics; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In the current session there have been 11 representations in favour of the issue of needles for insulin injecting pens on prescription to diabetics. Where such needles are considered by a consultant to be clinically necessary, they can be obtained free of charge through the hospital service.

The wider availability of needles for insulin injecting pens on prescription will be considered when the evaluation of the specification and costs, presently being carried out by the Department of Health on behalf of all health departments, is completed.

Lockerbie

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new evidence he has received about the responsibility for the Lockerbie bombing since 14 November.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The warrant issued on 14 November 1991 for the arrest of two Libyans for their involvement in the bombing of PA 103 resulted from an independent investigation lasting over three years. That investigation continues. As the Lord Advocate said in his announcement on 14 November 1991 proceedings are active for the purposes of the Contempt of Court Act 1981 and he cannot and will not comment on the evidence on which the charges are based. Nor can he comment on evidence received since the warrant was issued.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many crimes per 100,000 people were recorded in 1979 and the latest year for which figures are available;

(2) how many crimes were recorded in Scotland in 1979 and the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 26 February 1992]:* The number of crimes recorded by the police per 100,000 people in Scotland in 1979 and 1990 was 6,710 and 10,502 respectively. The number of crimes recorded by the police in Scotland for those same years was 346,680 and 535,864 respectively.[1]

[1] All the figures given are based on the revised classification of crimes and offences which was introduced at the beginning of 1980. The 1979 figures include crimes reported to the Procurator Fiscal by agencies other than the police (for example the Department of Health and Social Security) in which a prosecution was taken. In 1982, there were about 6,400 such cases so the overall effect on recorded crime is small.

NHS Waiting Lists

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were on national health service waiting lists in Scotland in 1979; and how many there were on the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 26 February 1992]:* The number of in-patients on the waiting list at 31 March 1979 was 76,968 compared with 60,693 at 31 March 1991. These figures are not directly comparable as an improved statistical information system was introduced in 1988.

Separate day case waiting list figures are available only from 1989. The number of day cases on the waiting list at 31 March 1991 was 18,673.

Manufacturing

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the level of manufacturing output in 1979; and what was the change between 1979 and latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 26 February 1992]:* The index (1985 = 100) of manufacturing output in Scotland in 1979 was 103·2 and in 1990, the latest year for which figures are available, was 115·4. This represents an increase of 11·8 per cent. in the 11 years between 1979 and 1990.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the level of manufacturing investment in 1979 and the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 26 February 1992]:* The levels of manufacturing investment in 1979 and 1989, the latest year for which data are available, are set out in the table.

Manufacturing Investment

£ million

Year	*Net capital expenditure*
1979	588·9
1989	1,232·2

Source: Annual Census of Production.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 28 February 1992

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Students (Concessionary Fares)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will re-introduce travel grants for students;

(2) if, when he next meets the chairman of London Underground, he will raise the issue of concessionary fares for students.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Under the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations, students who are disabled, who are attending a place away from their main college as part of a medical, dental or nursing course or who are attending an institution outside the United Kingdom as part of their course may have their travel costs reimbursed. The first part of any expenditure is disregarded in deciding claims. We have no plans to change these arrangements nor would we wish to raise the issue of concessionary fares for students with the chairman of London Underground.

London Docklands

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish his Department's expenditure in relation to projects aimed at regeneration and redevelopment in London docklands in each year from 1980-81 to 1990-91.

Mr. Eggar: Expenditure related to projects aimed at regeneration and redevelopment in London docklands is a matter for the Secretary of State for the Environment. This Department pays grant in respect of capital expenditure at voluntary-aided and grant-maintained schools. Records of such expenditure cannot easily be disaggregated to show spending only in the docklands area of the local education authorities concerned.

Pupil Statistics

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many pupils in each local education authority are educated in special schools outside their own local education authority area.

Mr. Fallon *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* The table shows the numbers of pupils belonging to the area of each authority who in January 1991 were attending maintained special schools outside that authority's area.

Pupils[1] belonging to the area of each local education authority who in January 1991 were attending maintained special schools outside that authority's area.

	Number
City of London	3
Camden	109
Greenwich	110
Hackney	172
Hammersmith and Fulham	89
Islington	123
Kensington and Chelsea	178
Lambeth	222
Lewisham	171
Southwark	200
Tower Hamlets	101
Wandsworth	144
Westminster	129
Barking	27
Barnet	78
Bexley	78
Brent	72
Bromley	20
Croydon	51
Ealing	60
Enfield	101
Haringey	91
Harrow	36
Havering	52
Hillingdon	40
Hounslow	25
Kingston	18
Merton	57
Newham	62
Redbridge	55
Richmond	30
Sutton	45
Waltham Forest	19
Birmingham	28
Coventry	17
Dudley	69
Sandwell	63
Solihull	20
Walsall	19
Wolverhampton	21
Knowsley	10
Liverpool	22
St. Helens	38
Sefton	21
Wirral	21
Bolton	56
Bury	51
Manchester	43
Oldham	22
Rochdale	47
Salford	19
Stockport	39
Tameside	82
Trafford	27
Wigan	23
Barnsley	19
Doncaster	14
Rotherham	33
Sheffield	6
Bradford	13
Calderdale	13
Kirklees	29
Leeds	12
Wakefield	49
Gateshead	19
Newcastle	10
North Tyneside	10
South Tyneside	17
Sunderland	5
Isles of Scilly	0
Avon	9
Bedfordshire	15
Berkshire	36
Buckinghamshire	73
Cambridgeshire	10
Cheshire	72
Cleveland	7
Cornwall	29
Cumbria	6
Derbyshire	53
Devon	5
Dorset	11

	Number
Durham	73
East Sussex	32
Essex	113
Gloucestershire	11
Hampshire	64
Hereford and Worcester	26
Hertfordshire	56
Humberside	27
Isle of Wight	1
Kent	67
Lancashire	84
Leicestershire	19
Lincolnshire	28
Norfolk	12
North Yorkshire	51
Northamptonshire	27
Northumberland	28
Nottinghamshire	18
Oxfordshire	12
Shropshire	22
Somerset	10
Staffordshire	48
Suffolk	26
Surrey	78
Warwickshire	53
West Sussex	27
Wiltshire	43

[1] Pupils aged 5 and over (as at 31 August 1990).

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many pupils in each local education authority area in local education authority maintained special schools live in other local education authority areas.

Mr. Fallon *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* The table shows the numbers of pupils attending maintained special schools in each authority in January 1991 who belonged to the area of other LEAs.

Pupils[1] attending maintained special schools in each local education authority in January 1991 who belonged to the area of other authorities

	Number
City of London	0
Camden	219
Greenwich	185
Hackney	180
Hammersmith and Fulham	265
Islington	100
Kensington and Chelsea	86
Lambeth	305
Lewisham	95
Southwark	147
Tower Hamlets	42
Wandsworth	349
Westminster	90
Barking	14
Barnet	49
Bexley	4
Brent	40
Bromley	36
Croydon	20
Ealing	14
Enfield	37
Haringey	55
Harrow	12
Havering	3
Hillingdon	2
Hounslow	18
Kingston	37
Merton	10
Newham	16
Redbridge	27
Richmond	18
Sutton	28
Waltham Forest	312
Birmingham	137
Coventry	30
Dudley	3
Sandwell	21
Solihull	6
Walsall	18
Wolverhampton	33
Knowsley	39
Liverpool	53
St. Helens	17
Sefton	14
Wirral	3
Bolton	36
Bury	32
Manchester	159
Oldham	92
Rochdale	12
Salford	62
Stockport	8
Tameside	6
Trafford	15
Wigan	57
Barnsley	19
Doncaster	7
Rotherham	8
Sheffield	83
Bradford	40
Calderdale	1
Kirklees	6
Leeds	52
Wakefield	9
Gateshead	15
Newcastle	56
North Tyneside	9
South Tyneside	1
Sunderland	37
Isles of Scilly	0
Avon	34
Bedfordshire	6
Berkshire	38
Buckinghamshire	13
Cambridgeshire	18
Cheshire	40
Cleveland	40
Cornwall	0
Cumbria	0
Derbyshire	22
Devon	26
Dorset	14
Durham	10
East Sussex	33
Essex	31
Gloucestershire	12
Hampshire	66
Hereford and Worcester	35
Hertfordshire	103
Humberside	12
Isle of Wight	0
Kent	41
Lancashire	25
Leicestershire	4
Lincolnshire	19
Norfolk	10
North Yorkshire	25
Northamptonshire	6
Northumberland	14
Nottinghamshire	34
Oxfordshire	35
Shropshire	11
Somerset	5
Staffordshire	26
Suffolk	19
Surrey	132
Warwickshire	144
West Sussex	28
Wiltshire	3

[1] Pupils aged five and over (as at 31 August 1990).

TRANSPORT

Cash Limits

Mr. Bevan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes he proposes to his Department's non-voted cash limits for 1991-92.

Mr. Freeman: With the agreement of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary, the cash limit DTp/LACAP—Department of Transport/local authorities capital—covering credit approvals issued by my Department will be increased from £269,081,000 to £272,081,000. This increase will be matched by a reduction in the cash limit on class VII, vote 2 from £237,614,000 to £234,614,000.

Midland Metro

Mr. Bevan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on line one of the Midland metro.

Mr. Freeman: I strongly support the concept of the Midland metro line one. On present information, the scheme appears to meet the criteria for grant under section 56 of the Transport Act 1968. A decision on whether the project will be eligible for grant must await firm figures for capital costs based on tenders. I understand that the West Midlands passenger transport executive will be seeking tenders later this year. Provided the scheme meets the grant criteria in the light of these figures and provided sufficient resources are available, I can see no present reason why a grant for the construction of the project should not be made available at the appropriate time. The Government have already provided resources of £1·5 million for development work on the project. I am today authorising a further £3 million for development and preparatory work in the forthcoming financial year.

Blackwall Tunnel

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now keep, or request the Metropolitan police to maintain, a log of significant interruptions to free flow traffic conditions in and around the area of the Blackwall tunnel, and publish periodically the record of delays and their respective causes, together with any subsequent preventative action or investigation that is taken.

Mr. Freeman: Police controllers at the Blackwall tunnel keep a record of incidents. The Department's agents for the Blackwall tunnel also maintain an incident log. This ensures that information is readily available for those operating the system. Preventative action and investigation based on these logs and other information takes place as and when needed.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the respective duties, responsibilities and functions, including those for capital and other expenditures, of his Department, the London borough of Greenwich and the Metropolitan police for the Blackwall tunnel and its immediate approaches, together with a statement of the regular system of consultation and co-ordination between those officials most immediately concerned with its efficient management and maintenance.

Mr. Freeman: The Secretary of State for Transport is the highway authority for trunk roads in England, including the Blackwall tunnels. The London borough of Greenwich is the Department's agent for the tunnels and the southern approach roads. The London borough of Tower Hamlets is the Department's agent for the northern approach roads. The traffic control systems unit is the Department's agent for installing and maintaining electrical and communication equipment. The Metropolitan police are responsible for managing the traffic flows, reporting offences and attending incidents. There is efficient co-operation and co-ordination between these parties who regularly discuss all the issues associated with day-to-day management of this section of the trunk road network.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out schedules of expenditure relating to the annual maintenance and improvement, respectively, of the Blackwall tunnel and its immediate approaches which show the costs of recent and planned capital improvements, the annual costs of structural and highway maintenance, respectively, the estimated cost of police surveillance and contracts relating to the removal of vehicles, distinguishing between the liabilities of each public body concerned, and stating the actual or notional interest charges arising from major improvments, including that of the recently installed traffic control system.

Mr. Freeman: Through its agents the London borough of Greenwich and the traffic control systems unit, the Department has spent £5·5 million over the past three years on maintenance and capital improvements for the Blackwall tunnels. In addition £21 million is being spent over five years on refurbishing the northbound tunnel. The east London traffic control system was equipped by the Department at a cost of £3·4 million. I will write to the hon. member shortly with the more detailed information he has requested.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the function of the new central traffic control system for the Blackwall tunnel and its surrounding area, together with the functions it is capable of performing additional to those of the system that it replaces, and the future functions that it could perform without significant further capital expenditure.

Mr. Freeman: The new east London traffic control system provides for the operation of tidal flow in the Blackwall tunnels, emergency tunnel closures, and the operation of signals on the tunnel approaches. It is easier to operate, maintain and repair than the old system, and provides additionally for the detection of incidents, queues or slow moving traffic. The system is capable of controlling traffic management on all major roads and tunnels in the east London area with additional expenditure only on roadside equipment.

London Docklands

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish *(a)* total expenditure on the docklands light railway, *(b)* total expenditure on all other new rail and bus transport projects directly related to docklands regeneration, *(c)* total expenditure on all road developments and improvements and *(d)* any other

expenditure by his Department to assist in London docklands regeneration showing revenue and capital separately for each year from 1981-82 to 1991-92 (estimated) and plans for 1992-93 to 1994-95.

Mr. Freeman: Expenditure on the docklands light railway is:

£ million

	Investment	*Revenue*
1984-85	33·1	0
1985-86	33·0	0
1986-87	16·2	0
1987-88	60·6	3·5
1988-89	51·4	4·6
1989-90	93·1	7·7
1990-91	139·0	10·4
1991-92	[1]162·8	[1]15·0
1992-93 to 1994-95 3 year total £115 million[1]		

[1] Forecast.

It is not possible to distinguish expenditure on docklands by London Buses Ltd. and London Underground Limited's core business from their expenditure on other parts of London. The table gives investment on the Jubilee line extension:

	£ million
1990-91	40
1991-92	[1]101
1992-93	[1]393
1993-94	[1]614
1994-95	[1]454

[1] Forecast

British Rail plans to spend £20 million refurbishing Stratford by 1996 when the docklands light railway and Jubilee line extensions are expected to be open.

The following schemes in the national road programme which serve the London docklands area have been completed or are expected to be under construction by 1994-95.

A2 Rochester Way Relief Road
A13 Improvements Tower Hamlets/Newham
A13 Heathway to M25 Improvements
A12 Hackney to M11 Link
East London River Crossing
A406 South Woodford-Barking Relief Road
East London Traffic Control System

Expenditure on those schemes is:

	£ million
[2]1987-88	119
1988-89	11
1989-90	10
1990-91	15
1991-92	[1]14
1992-93	[1]50
1993-94	[1]170
1994-95	[1]310

[1] Forecast
[2] Up to

The Department is also responsible for maintenance and minor improvements to trunk roads in this area, and for the operation of the Woolwich ferry. Expenditure is as follows. Detailed figures for years prior to 1987-88 are not readily available.

	£ million
1987-88	3
1988-89	6
1989-90	11
1990-91	[1]10
1991-92	[1]9
1992-93	[1]10
1993-94	[1]10
1994-95	[1]10

[1] Forecast.

In addition, there is expenditure on refurbishment of the Blackwell tunnel as follows:

	£ million
1991-92	[1]10
1992-93	[1]7
1993-94	[1]5

[1] Forecast.

The Thames RiverBus service received a £500,000 grant in 1989-90 to promote and improve the service in recognition of its road decongestion and docklands regeneration benefits.

Supplementary credit approvals totalling £200,000 were given in February to the London borough of Newham in respect of bus priority schemes. Further resources are being held for possible allocation to Tower Hamlets when details are provided of their firm proposals.

Subsidies

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the total of revenue subsidy given to *(a)* London Underground, *(b)* London Buses, *(c)* Network SouthEast and *(d)* British Rail in each year from 1980-81 to 1994-95 (estimated), showing the financing sources for such subsidy in each year.

Mr. Freeman: Government grant is not paid separately to London Underground and London Buses. London Transport makes a claim for block grant each year on the basis of the external financing limit announced in the previous year's autumn statement. It is not possible, in advance of the claim, to apportion the grant for future years between revenue and capital. Over the next three years, Government grant to LT will be about £3·7 billion.

Subsidy is paid by the Government to the British Railways Board in the form of the public service obligation grant under EC regulation 1191/69 and section 3 of the Railways Act 1974, which compensates BR for maintaining loss-making passenger services. Grant is paid as a total to the board and the Government do not formally allocate it between sectors or geographical areas. However, estimates on the split for future grant allocations are now produced by the Department of Transport. Previous figures for NSE have been produced by BR in its document "Network Factfile 1991". The table shows BR's and NSE's PSO grant and LT revenue grant.

1990-91 prices (£000m)

	PSO grant	*PSO (NSE) grant*	*LT revenue grant*
1980	1,039	n.a.	[4]166
1981	1,231	n.a.	[4]135
1982	1,249	[1]471	[4]286
1983	1,250	[1]359	[4]257
1984-85	1,487	[1]326	208

	PSO grant	PSO (NSE) grant	LT revenue grant
1985-86	1,085	[1]65	166
1986-87	883	[1]184	85
1987-88	925	[1]214	56
1988-89	606	[1]141	44
1989-90	541	[1]92	51
1990-91	600	[1]153	84
[3]1991-92	850	325	[5]114
[3]1992-93	900	350	—
[3]1993-94	700	275	—
[3]1994-95	500	75	—

[1] *Source:* NSE document "Network Factfile 1991".
[2] 1984-85 was a 15-month period. The figure quoted is the 12-month equivalent.
[3] Estimates—source: Department of Transport Report 1992.
[4] LT was the responsibility of GLC in these years.
[5] Forecast outturn.

Liverpool-London Air Service

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport is he will ensure that the landing slots made available in London through the withdrawal of British Midland Airways of its Liverpool-London service are allocated only to an airline providing a similar service.

Mr. McLoughlin: No. An airline is free to decide how to use the take-off and landing slots that it holds. It is a matter for British Midland's commercial judgment whether to use the slots on another route, or to return them to the airport co-ordinator for re-allocation.

Coaches

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet representatives of London local authorities to raise the issue of improving coach parking facilities.

Mr. Freeman: I have already chaired a working group considering initiatives to improve tourist coach parking facilities for the 1992 season. Representatives from London boroughs have been members of this group. I am also chairing meetings with London Transport and some of the central London boroughs most affected by coach traffic to discuss coach terminal and off-street parking facilities. I hope that an announcement can be made shortly about measures to improve coach parking facilities in central London.

Thames River Bus

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what conditions for public funding for the Thames Riverbus service were set with respect to requirements for information to be available to help visitors at landing stages.

Mr. Freeman: None; but at the piers at which their vessels call, Riverbus provides a real-time passenger information system giving the expected time of arrival of the next service which is updated at minute intervals based on the position of vessels. Leaflets, posters and timetables are also provided.

PRIME MINISTER

South Africa

Mr. Cabora: To ask the Prime Minister if he raised at the meeting with Mr. De Klerk on 1 February, the proposition of giving the white electorate a veto on any agreement reached at the Conference for Democratic South Africa or otherwise over the negotiating process.

The Prime Minister: For President de Klerk to continue with his reforms, he has to have the support of the whole electorate. I discussed these reforms with President de Klerk on 1 February. I believe that the path of reform on which South Africa has embarked under President de Klerk's leadership is the only course which will allow her reintegration into the international community and enable her to attract the investment she needs for economic growth. That economic growth is in the interest of all South Africans.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Parole

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether a prisoner's continued denial of his or her guilt is a factor taken into account in deciding whether or not to accept a recommendation by the Parole Board to grant parole.

Mrs. Rumbold: When my right hon. Friend considers Parole Board recommendations to release prisoners, his principal concern is the risk involved. Denial of guilt per se does not dictate the outcome of the decision.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many recommendations of the Parole Board in each year since 1986 were *(a)* accepted, and *(b)* rejected in England and Wales.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information requested is given in the table.

Recommendations[1] for the release of prisoners on parole or licence by the Parole Board: by the outcome of recommendation 1986-90

	Accepted	Rejected
1986	3,651	29
1987	3,636	35
1988	3,811	29
1989	4,688	45
1990	3,282	77

[1] Excluding release on licence of prisoners detained for a period other than life under section 53(2) Children and Young Persons Act 1933.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many parole decisions were referred by the Parole Board to him in each year since 1986 in England and Wales.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information requested is given in the table. Under the provisions of section 60(1) of the Criminal Justice Act 1967 only recommendations for release on parole are referred to the Secretary of State by the Parole Board.

Recommendations for the release of determinate sentence prisoners on parole by the Parole Board: 1986-1990

	Recommended for parole by the Parole Board
1986	3,560
1987	3,524
1988	3,749
1989	4,614
1990	3,221

Crime Statistics

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish figures for *(a)* total recorded offences, *(b)* all violent crimes, *(c)* burglaries and *(d)* murders in (i) England and Wales and (ii) the Metropolitan police area, including the City of London, for each year from 1980-81 to 1991-92.

Mr. John Patten: The available information is given in the table:

Notifiable offences recorded by the police

12 months ending	*Total*	*Metropolitan Police District (including City of London) Violent crime*	*Burglary*	*Homicide*[1]
September 1981	625,646	29,256	142,682	173
September 1982	675,501	31,436	154,206	184
September 1983	677,548	33,187	154,100	161
September 1984	703,686	34,640	166,212	181
September 1985	738,574	38,003	158,238	170
September 1986	774,898	41,432	158,173	186
September 1987	746,658	42,780	150,664	210
September 1988	739,437	48,658	147,596	164
September 1989	745,354	53,042	145,143	172
September 1990	812,285	57,421	166,863	182
September 1991	916,648	64,644	188,999	181
England and Wales				
September 1981	2,895,403	138,228	700,714	606
September 1982	3,174,843	147,088	774,109	614
September 1983	3,252,585	153,250	810,582	553
September 1984	3,418,609	156,554	868,561	623
September 1985	3,587,206	166,856	874,380	615
September 1986	3,793,368	177,691	915,582	637
September 1987	3,891,364	192,451	914,078	682
September 1988	3,788,107	212,267	841,127	651
September 1989	3,778,544	236,411	804,402	654
September 1990	4,326,357	245,582	944,996	643
September 1991	5,135,595	261,409	1,169,713	690

[1] Includes murder, manslaughter and infanticide.

Mandatory Life Imprisonment

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons sentenced to a mandatory term of life imprisonment have served *(a)* more than 10 years, *(b)* 15 years or more, *(c)* 20 years or more and *(d)* 25 years or more, in each year since 1987 in England and Wales.

Mrs. Rumbold: The readily available information is published annually in "Prison Statistics England and Wales" (Table 8.3 of the latest volume, for 1990, Cm. 1800), copies of which are in the Library.

Asylum

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will publish a table showing the number of applications for asylum in the United Kingdom by country of origin of the applicants in 1991;

(2) how many applications for asylum in the United Kingdom were received in each month in 1991; and how many were received in January 1992.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is given in the table.

Applications[1] [2] *received for asylum in the United Kingdom, by nationality: January to December 1991 and January 1992*

	January 1991	*February 1991*	*March 1991*	*April 1991*	*May 1991*	*June 1991*	*July 1991*
Europe and Americas							
Bulgaria	15	45	40	40	55	45	30
Colombia	20	15	15	10	15	—	5
Romania	25	65	80	50	35	25	40
Turkey	370	205	180	205	145	160	205
USSR	10	35	10	25	25	10	10
Others	*	5	15	15	10	25	10
TOTAL	440	370	340	350	285	260	295
Africa							
Angola	420	370	600	940	530	440	520
Congo	30	15	30	40	—	20	20

	January 1991	February 1991	March 1991	April 1991	May 1991	June 1991	July 1991
Ethiopia	245	150	130	195	195	120	165
Ghana	195	225	245	330	370	230	230
Somalia	240	190	170	260	190	180	160
Sudan	70	40	35	40	40	35	135
Togo/Ivory Coast	65	50	80	200	175	50	190
Uganda	305	225	275	200	80	25	55
Zaire	435	375	615	1,150	550	520	625
Others	20	25	155	355	270	180	360
TOTAL	2,020	1,665	2,330	3,715	2,395	1,805	2,460
Middle East							
Iran	65	55	35	65	35	35	35
Iraq	125	75	110	70	55	25	45
Lebanon	295	145	65	40	25	15	15
Others	—	—	25	45	30	20	40
TOTAL	485	275	235	225	145	95	135
Asia							
China	20	50	45	60	55	40	55
India	230	185	160	165	170	175	165
Pakistan	350	255	305	320	305	290	245
Sri Lanka	585	450	385	355	360	275	255
Others	—	—	85	85	90	55	115
TOTAL	1,185	940	980	990	975	835	830
Other nationalities[3]	240	195	—	—	—	—	—
GRAND TOTAL	4,370	3,445	3,885	5,275	3,805	3,000	3,725

	August 1991	September 1991	October 1991	November 1991	December 1991	1991 Total	January 1992
Europe and Americas							
Bulgaria	20	30	15	20	15	375	25
Colombia	10	20	5	15	15	140	30
Romania	65	60	30	45	35	555	35
Turkey	155	145	125	125	95	2,110	205
USSR	20	25	25	20	25	245	20
Others	25	50	70	110	110	450	130
TOTAL	295	335	275	335	300	3,875	440
Africa							
Angola	360	360	600	465	170	5,780	40
Congo	25	70	50	65	15	370	10
Ethiopia	110	150	115	65	45	1,685	65
Ghana	145	145	115	105	70	2,405	140
Somalia	140	145	135	110	80	1,995	125
Sudan	160	155	175	150	120	1,150	100
Togo/Ivory Coast	185	185	360	315	45	1,910	35
Uganda	15	55	65	50	90	1,440	15
Zaire	420	555	725	625	410	7,010	105
Others	345	500	745	625	155	3,740	95
TOTAL	1,900	2,320	3,090	2,580	1,205	27,490	730
Middle East							
Iran	35	50	35	50	35	530	50
Iraq	75	55	70	110	85	915	125
Lebanon	35	20	35	30	35	755	35
Others	30	35	50	35	30	340	40
TOTAL	175	170	190	225	180	2,540	250
Asia							
China	25	50	50	35	45	525	35
India	155	160	190	135	165	2,045	245
Pakistan	240	235	290	210	150	3,195	160
Sri Lanka	285	205	225	235	135	3,750	255
Others	265	50	65	40	35	890	55
TOTAL	970	700	815	655	530	10,405	745

	August 1991	September 1991	October 1991	November 1991	December 1991	1991 Total	January 1992
Other nationalities[3]	—	—	—	—	—	435	—
GRAND TOTAL	3,340	3,525	4,375	3,790	2,210	44,745	2,165

[1] Excluding dependants.
[2] Figures rounded to the nearest five, with * = less than three.
[3] Includes applications in January and February 1991 from nationalities not specifically identified above. From March 1991 these are included in the "other" category for the relevant geographical area.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce regulations to require magistrates to use the power to remit the community charge in full or in part for those people who cannot pay as determined by the means inquiry at committal stage.

Mr. John Patten: No.

Dangerous Dogs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been made under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Criminal statistics are compiled annually. None are yet available in respect of prosecutions under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 which came into force on 12 August last year.

Immigration

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes he proposes to make to entry qualifications for settlement from Pakistan after April; whether he will still accept applications for settlement on the basis of marriage from that date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has no plans to make any changes in the immigration rules relating to the admission of Pakistani nationals.

Election Expenses

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he now expects to publish and bring into force an order on the variation of limits of candidates' election expenses.

Mrs. Rumbold: The draft Representation of the People (Variation of limits of Candidates' Elections Expenses) Order 1992 was laid before Parliament on Friday 21 February, and will come into force following approval by both Houses. It will increase the permitted levels of candidates' expenses at parliamentary elections throughout the United Kingdom, and at local elections in Great Britain.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the statutory provisions relating to the levying by local authorities of a poll tax non-payment surcharge; and what is the total national cost of the non-payment surcharges levied by local authorities in England and Wales for 1991-92.

Mr. Key: To comply with section 32 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, an authority must make adequate allowance for estimated non-collection when setting its charges.

Before the £140 general reduction, local authorities had made provision for £600 million for non-collection in 1991-92 when setting their charges.

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the total of local government *(a)* revenue and *(b)* capital expenditure by local government within each region, showing Greater London separately, for each year from 1978-79 to 1991-92 (estimated).

Mr. Key: The available information is as follows:

Revenue Expenditure[1]

£ million

Region	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	[2]1990-91	[3]1991-92
Greater London	3,854	4,111	4,677	5,000	4,676	5,128	5,408	5,553	5,969	6,467	6,987
South East (excluding GL)	3,284	3,541	3,691	3,768	3,933	4,201	4,582	5,162	5,395	6,245	6,934
South West	1,425	1,549	1,595	1,613	1,683	1,879	2,047	2,211	2,397	2,735	3,008
East Anglia	593	659	675	693	720	776	839	941	1,034	1,179	1,306
West Midlands	1,894	2,015	2,126	2,146	2,243	2,377	2,675	2,907	3,112	3,617	3,974
East Midlands	1,303	1,478	1,523	1,528	1,577	1,754	1,943	2,118	2,203	2,550	2,802
North West	2,644	2,836	2,921	2,954	3,085	3,427	3,719	3,984	4,261	4,695	5,085
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,902	2,146	2,165	2,181	2,271	2,561	2,689	2,897	3,048	3,411	3,727
North	1,271	1,402	1,438	1,429	1,472	1,657	1,784	1,895	1,986	2,243	2,435
Total	18,171	19,737	20,809	21,312	21,661	23,760	25,686	27,667	29,404	33,142	36,256

Capital expenditure[4]

£ million

Region	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*[5]1990-91*	*[6]1991-92*
Greater London	1,362	1,433	1,592	2,593	1,431	1,369
South East (excluding Greater London)	1,147	1,265	1,648	2,103	1,450	1,457
South West	429	448	543	744	578	608
East Anglia	196	205	263	364	263	275
West Midlands	585	603	705	964	703	693
East Midlands	401	415	456	586	448	491
North West	801	846	856	1,098	893	910
Yorkshire and Humberside	514	591	695	872	644	677
North	411	417	447	497	379	410
Total	5,846	6,224	7,206	9,822	6,788	6,891

[1] Total expenditure figures are given for 1981-82 to 1989-90. Net revenue expenditure figures are given for 1990-91 and 1991-92. Although both are net of specific and supplementary grants, direct comparisons cannot be made as they derive from two different systems.
[2] Revised estimate.
[3] Budget.
[4] 1986-87 includes amounts charged direct to revenue or other funds and not capitalised, which are excluded in later years. Figures for 1990-91 and 1991-92 are not strictly comparable to earlier years owing to the introduction of the new capital finance system from 1 April 1990. Polytechnics were transferred out of local government from 1 April 1989.
[5] Provisional outturn.
[6] Local authority forecast.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money was paid to local authorities to cover the cost of the £140 reduction for poll tax bills.

Mr. Portillo: The sum of £4·374 billion of grant is being paid in 1991-92 under the Community Charges (General Reduction) Act 1991. The sum of £4·346 billion of this had already been paid in respect of charge income forgone, and represents 90 per cent. of the amount due, based on local authorities' own initial estimates of charge income to be collected for the year. Further payments are to be made, with effect from 1992-93, to bring the total amount paid into line with the total income forgone on charges actually collected for the year. In addition, I estimate the £28 million will have been paid by the end of the financial year to reimburse authorities for rebilling and other administrative costs directly resulting from the Act.

Council House Building

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authority permanent dwellings were started in Great Britain in each year since 1979.

Mr. Yeo: The latest information for 1980 and 1990 is published in table 6.1 of "Housing and Construction Statistics: Great Britain: 1980-1990". Figures for 1979 appear in the 1979-1989 edition of the same publication. Provisional figures for 1991 were released in a departmental information bulletin (No. 87) on 5 February 1992—local authorities account for virtually all the starts by local authorities, new towns and Government Departments in 1991. Copies are in the Library.

Recycling

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance he has provided for the development of paper, plastics and glass recycling plants in the United Kingdom; and if he has any plans to develop additional recycling plants.

Mr. Baldry: Our preferred approach is for industry to come up with recycling initiatives that will stand the test of time in a free market. The Government's role is to provide the appropriate legal and economic framework to encourage recycling.

The legal framework is set out in the Environmental Protection Act 1990, certain provisions of which are designed to make recycling more attractive. The Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment have also commissioned a study of economic instruments having the potential to encourage higher recycling rates.

Industry can seek funding for research and development through the environmental technology innovation scheme—ETIS—operated jointly by my Department and the Department of Trade and Industry, and the DEMOS —the Department of Trade and Industry's environmental management option scheme—and Euroenviron schemes, administered by the Department of Trade and Industry.

Recent ETIS grants include £100,500 to British Glass and £835,100 to Anaplast Ltd. to support research into new methods of recycling waste glass and plastic respectively; under the DEMOS scheme, a grant of £283,000 was awarded to Drinkwater Saby Ltd. as part of a collaborative project involving the collection of recyclable household waste and its sorting into marketable fractions; and a grant of £700,000 under the Euroenviron scheme was given to a collaborative project, including a United Kingdom firm, Rosehill Polymers, which aims to research ways in which waste tyres and plastic bottles can be recycled into marketable higher grade products.

Unified Business Rate

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the entitlement to hardship relief for the unified business rate; and in what ways its availability is made known to businesses.

Mr. Key: Section 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 gives a charging authority discretion to reduce or remit the payment of non-domestic rates. But an authority may not give relief unless it is satisfied that the ratepayer would otherwise sustain hardship and it is reasonable to do so having regard to the interests of its community charge payers. Guidance has been issued to all authorities

but it is for them to consider the merits of each case and how the availability of relief should be made known to businesses. Seventy-five per cent. of the cost of any relief granted will be borne centrally by the non-domestic rates pool with the remainder being met locally by charge payers.

Redmire to Redcar Rail Link

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had about the environmental impact of the possible closure of the Redmire to Redcar rail link; and what assessment he has made of the extent to which the transfer of traffic from rail to road is in accordance with his Department's environmental objectives.

Mr. Yeo: None. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport said in answer to the hon. Member today, British Steel has agreed to continue transporting limestone on the Redmire line until the end of September, and officials from his Department are to host discussions to explore the scope for keeping the limestone traffic on the line in the longer term.

Planning Authorities (Development Policy)

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to encourage local planning authorities to make known a clear presumption against development in areas unsuitable for development, in order to deter repeated applications.

Mr. Yeo: Guidance on the preparation of development plans in PPG12, published on 10 February 1992, emphasises that such plans provide the framework for sound and effective development control. While they must make adequate provision for development, full account must also be taken of the need to protect the built and natural environments. Planning applications must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. An applicant who proposes development which is clearly in conflict with the development plan would need to produce convincing reasons to demonstrate why the plan should not prevail.

Development plans will therefore give much greater certainty about what development will and will not be acceptable in particular locations. Coupled with local planning authorities' power, under section 17 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991, to turn away certain categories of repetitive planning applications, the new development plan system should reduce considerably the incidence of repeated applications.

London Docklands

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish *(a)* the total grant paid to the London Docklands development corporation *(b)* expenditure by his Department outside the LDDC area but directly related to docklands redevelopment in east London and *(c)* other expenditure by his Department on regeneration within the LDDC area showing revenue and capital separately for each year from 1981-82 to 1991-92 (estimated) and plans for 1992-93 to 1994-95.

Mr. Portillo: (a) Total grant paid to the London Docklands development corporation (LDDC) from 1981-82 to 1991-92 is:

	Revenue £ million	*Capital £ million (rounded)*
1981-82	2	28
1982-83	8	33
1983-84	9	54
1984-85	11	48
1985-86	11	43
1986-87	12	53
1987-88	12	71
1988-89	18	98
1989-90	20	236
1990-91	22	311
[1]1991-92	22	227

[1] Estimated.

The provisional allocation for 1992-93 is £21 million (revenue) and £81 million (capital).

Levels of grant for 1993-94 and 1994-95 have not be determined.

(b) My Department's inner-city programmes support various regeneration activities. Although it is not possible to quantify the value of schemes relating directly to docklands redevelopment, inner-city expenditure (capital and revenue) in the boroughs of Newham, Southwark and Tower Hamlets, is:

	£ million (rounded)
1981-82	2
1982-83	1
1983-84	3
1984-85	5
1985-86	4
1986-87	7
1987-88	8
1988-89	8
1989-90	9
1990-91	9
[1]1991-92	13

[1] Estimated.

The allocation for 1992-93 has not yet been finalised, and grant levels for 1993-94 and 1994-95 have not been determined.

(c) I will write to the hon. Member with this information.

Shelters, London

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of new provision of shelters and other accommodation for the roofless in Greater London in 1990, 1991, 1992, including the numbers of places made available at each location.

Mr. Yeo: Between 1990 and 1992 my Department has provided 489 places in 19 hostels and 779 places in winter shelters in Greater London under the rough sleepers initiative. We have also provided bedspaces in permanent independent accommodation for rough sleepers to move on to. A list of the places made available in 1990, 1991 and so far in 1992 states:

List of hostel places

Managing Agency	*Hostel Name*	*Beds*	*Opening date*
St. Mungo Association	Nevern Square, SW5	20	December 1990
St. Mungo Association	Bassett Road, W10	22	December 1990
Providence Row	Crispin Street, E1	8	January 1991
Look Ahead HA	Princess Beatrice House, SW10	4	February 1991
St. Mungo Association	City Road, EC1	45	February 1991
English Churches Housing Group	Station Hotel, N1	33	April 1991
English Churches Housing Group	King George Hostel, SW1	100	April 1991
Centrepoint Soho	Vauxhall Hostel, SW8	60	May 1991
St. Mungo Association	Vartry Road, N15	19	May 1991
Providence Row	Crispin Street, E1	16	June 1991
English Churches Housing Group	Chevening Road, NW6	6	June 1991
English Churches Housing Group	St. Mark's Rectory, NW1	13	July 1991
De Paul Trust	Moorhouse Road, W2	16	July 1991
Shaftesbury Society	Sir John Kirk Centre, SE5	22	July 1991
Shaftesbury Society	Lansdowne Centre, SE1	22	August 1991
YMCA National Council	10-12 West Cromwell Road, SW5	34	September 1991
United Kingdom Housing Trust	Arlington House, NW1	7	September 1991
Shaftesbury Society	Aldershot Road, NW6	6	October 1991
De Paul Trust	Lord Clyde, SE11	36	October 1991

List of places in winter shelters

Managing Agency	*Hostel Name*	*Beds*	*Opening date*
London Borough of Hammersmith	Bulwer Street, W12	30	February 1991 (closed September 1991)
Salvation Army	Blackfriars Road, SE1	80	February 1991 (closed March 1991)
London Borough of Lambeth	Coronation Hall, SE1	16	February 1991 (closed March 1991)
Croydon YMCA	Causton Hall, Croydon	25	February 1991 (closed April 1991)
Centrepoint Soho	Soho Square, W1	40	February 1991 (closed May 1991)
St. Mungo's Association	Paddington Green, W2	75	February 1991
City of Westminster	Bruce House, Kemble Street, WC2	60	February 1991
The Passage	Westminster Cathedral Night Shelter, SW1	40	February 1991
Crisis	Tooley Street, SE1	60	December 1991
English Churches Housing Group	Rame House, Tooting Bec, SW17	25	December 1991
Croydon YMCA	Causton Hall, Croydon	25	December 1991
South London Family Housing Association	Lawrie Park Road, SE26	50	December 1991
St. Christopher's Fellowship	Ealing Hospital, W5	25	December 1991
London Borough of Camden	Heysham House, NW3	30	December 1991
Salvation Army	St. Ann's Street, SW1	20	December 1991
London Borough of Lambeth	Cynthia Molsey House, SE11	25	January 1992
London Borough of Camden	Grays Inn Road, WC1	35	January 1992
London Borough of Camden	Parker Street, WC1	18	January 1992
Centrepoint Soho	Soho Square, W1	45	January 1992
Single Homeless Project	Abbey Centre, Marsham Street, SW1	35	February 1992
Salvation Army	Atlantic House, EC2	20	February 1992

In addition, we have provided 522 places in flats and houses leased from the private sector.

Homeless Statistics

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the total numbers of homeless individuals in *(a)* England, *(b)* Greater London, *(c)* outer London and *(d)* inner London in each year from 1980-81 to 1991-92.

Mr. Yeo: The available information is on the numbers of households for whom local authorities accepted responsibility for securing permanent accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 and the Housing Act 1985. Estimates of the total number of persons in these households are not available centrally.

Year	*England*	*Greater London*	*Inner London*[1]	*Outer London*
1980	60,400	17,100	9,820	7,280
1981	66,990	18,010	10,080	7,930
1982	71,620	20,630	11,880	8,750
1983	75,470	23,620	12,590	11,030
1984	80,500	24,740	15,330	9,410
1985	91,010	27,070	16,600	10,470
1986	100,490	29,380	18,160	11,220
1987	109,170	29,220	18,390	10,380
1988	113,770	28,880	16,680	12,200
1989	122,180	33,020	20,290	12,730
1990	140,350	36,480	21,890	14,590
[2]1991	110,740	29,310	17,920	11,390

[1] Inner London comprises City of London, Camden, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, Haringey, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Newham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth and Westminster.
[2] First 3 quarters only

A new reporting system was introduced for the non-metropolitan districts from the fourth quarter 1980 and for London and other metropolitan authorities from the third quarter 1982 and figures for 1980 to 1982 are not strictly comparable with those for later periods. From the second quarter 1991 the definition of acceptance was altered to exclude intentionally homeless and all earlier figures have been adjusted to the new basis.

Gravel

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what forecasts for gravel demand have been made by his Department for the next five, 10 and 20 years; and what steps are being taken to seek substitutes which would have less environmental impact than gravel extraction.

Sir George Young: Independent forecasts of the long-term national demand for primary aggregates, which include gravel, were published for consultation by the Department in May 1991. These covered the 20-year period to 2011 and showed projected annual demand in England and Wales could reach between 421 metric tonnes and 490 metric tonnes by that time. The Government have a comprehensive programme of research projects examining alternative sources of supply of aggregates. This includes marine dredged aggregates and coastal superquarries. The Government are also committed to increasing the use of waste and recycled materials. Research into the scope for using these as aggregates was published by the Department in July 1991. The research suggested various ways to stimulate increased usage. These are being progressed at present.

Leigh Barton

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment at the present level of four general craftsmen involved in repair work, when he expects the historic monument of Leigh Barton to be open to the general public; how much has been spent on restoration and renovation work since the monument was taken into public ownership in 1986; whether the funds are available to complete the necessary work; and if he will make a statement as to his policy on restoring historic monuments so that they can be safely open to the public.

Mr. Yeo: Since its acquisition in 1974, work to Leigh Barton has cost about £300,000. English Heritage expects to have to spend another £250,000 before the programme of work can be completed. It has not been possible for it to give the work the priority that it would wish because of other demands on its financial resources. The work is now expected to recommence in 1994-95 and continue into 1995-96, when English Heritage will review the future opening arrangements.

English Heritage is committed to putting its estate into good repair, maintaining it and managing it efficiently for the benefit of the nation. The properties in care cover a wide variety of England's historic buildings and monuments. In some instances it is appropriate for English Heritage to consider an alternative use for its properties, rather than maintain them solely for public access with a custodial presence. In the case of Leigh Barton, English Heritage is looking at a possible alternative use for the farmhouse which could generate an income and be compatible with some future public access.

RENAVAL

Sir Robin Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the statement on 17 February, *Official Report*, column 27, and the answer by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, on 24 February , *Official Report*, column *380*, when he will issue the necessary instructions to enable the RENAVAL programme in Plymouth to commence.

Sir George Young: The RENAVAL programme for the travel-to-work area of Plymouth was approved by the European Commission on 20 December 1900. The inaugural meeting of the programme co-ordinating committee was held on 21 March 1991. Some European regional development fund payments have already been authorised in respect of the programme.

UN Environment Programme

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte report on the efficiency of the United Nations environment programme with regard to the United Kingdom's donations to UNEP.

Mr. Heseltine: My Department already has a copy of this report.

EC Funding

Mr. Enright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether those local authorities in areas eligible to receive European regional development fund assistance will enjoy an increase in their captial allocations to enable utilisation of European regional development fund allocations without a reduction in the proportion of supplementary credit allocation not available to match European regional development fund grant, but used to support housing, education, personal and social services and transport schemes.

Mr. Yeo: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made in the House on 17 February by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, in which he indicated that future public expenditure plans would show forecast ERDF receipts separately and this would demonstrate that public expenditure cover would be clearly available for such receipts. The detailed arrangements for this are still the subject of dicussion amongst the relevant Government Departments.

Rose Theatre

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give further consideration to including the site of the Rose theatre remains in Southwark in his schedule of ancient monuments.

Mr. Yeo: I am pleased to announce that, following a joint request by CMD Property Developments Ltd. and BriTel Fund Trustees Ltd. and consultation with English Heritage, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has

today included the site of the Rose theatre remains in his schedule of ancient monuments. Development of the Rose Court building which includes the provision of sufficient headroom over the remains to allow for their possible future display, is complete. Scheduling at this time will ensure that any proposals for works to the monument, including works in connection with its long term preservation and possible display, would be fully considered through the statutory scheduled monument consent procedures.

"This Common Inheritance"

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has completed the consultation on the policy of banning or discouraging all uses of asbestos as set out in the Government's White Paper, "This Common Inheritance—The First Year Report"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: In September 1991 it was announced in the White Paper "This Common Inheritance—The First Year Report" that the Government were consulting on

"a policy of banning or discouraging all uses of asbestos, expect for a number of existing uses were detailed risk assessment has shown that suitable substitutes are either not available or do not offer a materially better option in safety or other terms".

Subsequently, the European Commission announced that it would propose a draft directive, to ban remaining types of asbestos, with exemptions for some uses of chrysotile (white asbestos).

Consultations on the proposed policy and the expected directive have involved the Department of Trade and Industry, the Health and Safety Executive, the Department of the Environment's advisory committee on hazardous substances, the Confederation of British Industry and the asbestos industry. The consultation is now complete.

In negotiating the expected draft directive, the Government's policy will be that remaining uses of asbestos should be limited to essential cases where less hazardous substitutes are not yet available, based on assessment of risks and costs during production, use and disposal. The Government's aim is to see this policy introduced Community-wide, as part of their strategy to assess, and where possible reduce, the potential health and environmental impacts of hazardous substances.

The existing legislation, which prohibits the most dangerous types and uses of asbestos and controls work activities involving asbestos and disposal of asbestos, will remain. There will be no requirement to remove and dispose of asbestos materials already in place, such as in buildings (for example as insulation), in cars (for example, as brake pads) or in industrial situations (for example, as seals or gaskets). The Government advise that asbestos materials in poor condition should be removed, but that materials in good condition should remain in place. Further detailed advice is available in the Department of the Environment's booklet "Asbestos Materials in Buildings" which is available from HMSO.

Fuel and Power Industry Processes

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, when the remainder of the process guidance notes for the fuel and power industry processes prescribed under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 will be available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier *[pursuant to his reply, 4 February 1992, c. 137]:* I am very pleased to report that we have today issued 26 more guidance notes covering almost all the remaining processes which are to be prescribed for local authority air pollution control under the Act from 1 April. These notes have been drawn up after consultation with relevant industries, local authorities and other interested bodies. They will provide a sound framework within which local authorities will be able to exercise their new air pollution control functions.

A set of notes will be placed in the Library of the House. The notes are also being sent to district and borough councils and to port health authorities.

These notes substantially complete the guidance for the processes prescribed for local authority control under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. All the published notes will, however, be reviewed regularly, and additional or amended notes will be issued if and when the need arises.

Renewable Energy Sources

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to publish a policy planning guidance note for the development of renewable energy sources.

Mr. Yeo: A consultation paper inviting comments on a draft planning policy guidance note (PPG) on this topic was issued by my Department on 5 December. Separate but parallel consultation is being carried out by the Welsh Office. My right hon. Friends intend to publish this PPG later this year.

New Parliamentary Building

Mr. Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a progress report on the design of the new parliamentary building; and what arrangements are being made to show the proposals to hon. Members.

Mr. Heseltine: I have kept in close touch with the development of the design of the new building, including making a number of visits to the offices of the architect Michael Hopkins and Partners to see the work at first hand. The design is making good progress, has received a favourable response from the Royal Fine Art Commission, and the informal consultations with Westminster city council and English Heritage are progressing well prior to making a submission for planning consent under DOE circular 18/84. The work is on target for completion of the final sketch design stage by Easter 1992 and I am confident that the design will develop to provide a building which, as the Services Committee said:

"should come to be regarded world wide as an example of the very finest late twentieth century British architecture".

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has announced that there will be a debate on the design

proposals on Monday 9 March. I understand that, to enable right hon. and hon. Members to form their own view on the proposals, the Accommodation and Works Committee has arranged for the model of the building together with plans, perspectives and elevations to be exhibited in Westminster Hall for two weeks from 2 March. A brochure describing the scheme is also being sent to all right hon. and hon. Members.

EMPLOYMENT

Social Fund (Vocational Training)

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether unemployed claimants who are receiving unemployment benefit who participate in European social fund vocational training courses provided either by *(a)* voluntary organisations or local authorities, or *(b)* training and enterprise councils or local enterprise companies, are required to be available for and actively seeking employment.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Industrial Relations

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a list of those who responded to the Green Paper, "Industrial Relations in the 1990s".

Mr. Forth: As with all previous Green Papers on this subject, the responses to "Industrial Relations in the 1990s" have been treated as confidential unless the organisations concerned have made their views public. This applies both to the content of particular representations and to the identification of their source. At the request of the hon. Member for Sedgefield, my Department has written to all those who responded to the latest Green Paper to ask if they would be willing to be identified.

Wages Council

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the current wages councils and the numbers of *(a)* workers and *(b)* establishments covered by each council.

Mr. Forth: The latest information available is given in the table:

Numbers of Establishments covered by wages councils in January 1990 and estimated numbers of workers covered in 1988

Wages Councils	*Establishments*	*Workers*
Aerated Waters	264	5,500
Boot and Shoe Repairing	2,970	5,000
Button Manufacturing	49	1,000
Clothing Manufacturing	6,513	147,000
Coffin Furniture and Cerement Making	21	200
Cotton Waste Reclamation	25	300
Flax and Hemp	10	500
Fur	187	1,500
General Waste Materials Reclamation	1,443	13,000
Hairdressing	33,941	64,000
Hat, Cap and Millinery	124	4,000
Lace Finishing	62	900
Laundry	1,067	26,000
Licensed non-Residential Establishments	67,734	492,000
Licensed Residential Establishments and Licensed Restaurants	34,758	379,000
Linen and Cotton Handkerchief and Household Goods and Linen Piece Goods	138	2,500
Made-Up Textiles	289	3,000
Ostrich and Fancy Feather and Artificial Flower	36	500
Perambulator and Invalid Carriage	30	2,000
Retail Bespoke Tailoring	481	4,000
Retail Food and Allied Trades	111,029	465,000
Retail Trades (Non-Food)	114,741	745,000
Rope Twine and Net	91	2,500
Sack and Bag	63	1,000
Toy Manufacturing	218	11,000
Unlicensed Place of Refreshment	18,897	96,000
Total	395,181	2,472,400

Labour Statistics

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the total number of employees in employment within *(a)* the south-east region, *(b)* Greater London, *(c)* outer London, *(d)* inner London and *(e)* each London borough in each year from 1980 to 1990.

Mr. Jackson: Information for areas smaller than the standard economic regions is only available from the censuses of employment for 1981, 1984, 1987 and 1989. The available information can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the total number of registered unemployed people there were in *(a)* the south-east region, *(b)* Greater London, *(c)* outer London, *(d)* inner London and *(e)* each London borough in each year from 1980 to 1990.

Mr. Jackson: The numbers of people claiming unemployment related benefits can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently in work in *(a)* the east midlands and *(b)* Derbyshire; and how many people were in work in these areas in 1979.

Mr. Forth: Estimates for areas within standard regions are available only from the census of employment. The earliest and most recent estimates for the county on a comparable basis are for 1981 and 1989. These are given in the table together with estimates for the region in 1979, 1991 and the two census dates.

Employees in employment

(Thousands)

September of each year	*East Midlands*	*Derbyshire*
1979	1,565·4	—
1981	1,466·5	334·9
1989	1,573·6	353·3
1991	1,520·7	—

Trade Unions

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians' conduct of its affairs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment has received no such representations. However, deficiencies in the register of members of the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians have been widely reported. These include the listing of people who are not union members. The Government intend to introduce legislation to strengthen the rights of union members against electoral fraud arising from such deficiencies in trade union registers.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 25 February, *Official Report*, column *457*, what representations he has received about the conduct of the elections for *(a)* officials and *(b)* other bodies of the former National Union of Seamen in 1984, 1985 and 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment has received no representations about any of the elections mentioned. Statutory requirements covering elections for members of trade unions' principal executive committees first came into effect in October 1985. The current requirements, together with the additional proposals in the Green Paper "Industrial Relations in the 1990s" (Cm. 1602), are intended to ensure that the basic right of union members to free and fair elections is effectively protected.

Small Businesses

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received calling for legislation to help alleviate the problems caused to small businesses by the slow payment of bills; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment and I have both received representations for legislation from individual small business owners and managers, trade and other associations and from hon. Members. Although I understand the frustrations felt by small businesses because of delayed payments I remain to be convinced that legislation would be effective. The majority of organisations representing small firms share the Government's view that the effect of a legislative approach would be, at best, minimal and could even be damaging to the small firms sector. I have made it known, however, that I would be interested to receive views on how an effective legislative framework might operate.

My Department will continue to address late payment through a strategy of persuasion and education and, in addition to a number of measures already in place. I am keeping the issue under close review.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Homelessness

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions he has had with local authorities regarding the provision of hostels for the homeless to match the reduction of resettlement units; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The management of the Ressettlement Agency and day-to-day negotiations with local authorities and voluntary bodies are matters for Mr. Tony Ward, the chief executive, although no unit is closed unless Ministers are satisfied with replacement proposals. He will write to my hon. Friend and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Claimants, Leeds

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will show for each year from 1987 to 1991 the number of people in the Leeds metropolitan district who claimed *(a)* family credit, *(b)* income support and *(c)* community charge benefit both (i) in total and (ii) by benefit office.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in the Leeds metropolitan district *(a)* applied for social fund, (i) community care grants, (ii) budgeting loans and (iii) crisis loans and *(b)* received community care grants, budgeting loans and crisis loans, shown (1) numerically and (2) in real cash terms every year from 1987 to 1991, shown both in totals and by benefit office.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Income Support

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will obtain for his departmental library, a copy of the research undertaken by Sean Stitt of Newcastle polytechnic into the viability of income support; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department received a copy of this last year. We are always interested in research which might bear upon the effectiveness of income support, although we would not accept the assumptions made in this report.

Pensions Uprating

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would have been the cost in each year to public funds at 1992 prices to have maintained since November 1980 the system by which statutory up-rating of pensions was required to increase by whichever was the higher of prices or earnings.

Miss Widdecombe: The annual cost to the national insurance fund (at 1991-92 prices at £ millions) of uprating basic retirement pensions each year by prices or earnings whichever was higher in each year starting in November 1980 for each financial year is given in the table:

Financial Year	*Cost £ millions*
1980-81	127
1981-82	552
1982-83	747
1983-84	833
1984-85	1,509
1985-86	1,679
1986-87	2,581
1987-88	3,769
1988-89	4,571
1989-90	5,430
1990-91	5,884
1991-92	6,271

There would be some offsetting savings in expenditure on income-related benefits.

The cost to the national insurance fund of these extra costs in 1991-92 would mean an increase of £8·70 per week in the combined national insurance contributions of a man on average earnings and his employer.

Expenditure

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what change there has been in social security spending since 1978-79; and what change is expected for the future.

Miss Widdecombe: Total expenditure on social security increased by 52 per cent. or £23 billion in real terms between 1978-79 and 1991-92. Between 1991-92 and 1994-95, expenditure is expected to grow by £6·4 billion at 1991-92 prices. Of the overall increase, 32 per cent. relates to expenditure on benefits for elderly people, 39 per cent. on benefits for long-term sick and disabled people, and 13 per cent. on benefits for lone parent families. The figures given above for past growth, and for the division on future growth between client groups correct those given in the DSS departmental report (Cm. 1914).

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing for each year since 1970 the number of males and females paying national insurance contributions and the amount collected in contributions as a percentage of gross domestic product to one place of decimals together with *(a)* the number earning more than the upper earnings limit, the amount earned by such males and females, and their aggregate incomes as a percentage of the amount by those paying national insurance and *(b)* the amount earned above the upper earnings limit as a proportion of the amount earned below it.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 19 February 1992]:* The information requested is in the tables:

	Numbers of people[1] paying contributions (thousands)		*Amount collected in contributions as a percentage of GDP[2]*
	Males	*Females*	
1970-71	—	—	4·6
1971-72	—	—	4·6
1972-73	—	—	4·7
1973-74	—	—	5·0
1974-75	—	—	5·3
1975-76	15,829	9,265	5·7
1976-77	15,722	9,189	6·2
1977-78	15,714	9,273	6·0
1978-79	15,654	9,279	5·5
1979-80	15,775	9,533	5·6
1980-81	15,256	9,148	6·2
1981-82	14,478	8,793	6·4
1982-83	14,166	8,664	6·8
1983-84	14,315	8,692	7·0
1984-85	14,243	8,860	6·7
1985-86	14,364	9,170	6·7
1986-87	14,369	9,308	6·5
1987-88	14,465	9,633	6·4
1988-89	14,670	10,096	6·5

[1] *Source:* 1 per cent. sample from Contributors and Contributions Statistics. Although some people pay a mixture of different types of contributions, each person is counted only once in the table. No figures are readily available for years prior to 1975 and are not yet available from 1989-90.

[2] All GDP data used are consistent with the Regional Accounts article published in *Economic Trends* November 1991. The contributions figures used in the calculations are the gross receipts for the NI fund which are set out in the NI fund accounts for each year.

(a) It is estimated that in 1991-92 on average 2·6 million men and 0·4 million women earn more than the upper earnings limit. Their earnings are estimated to be:

£ billion

Men	*Women*	*Total*
80	10	90

Their total earnings are expected to be about 34 per cent. of the earnings of all those who pay national insurance.

(b) It is estimated that the amount of all earnings above the upper earnings limit is about 11·5 per cent. of all the earnings below that limit.

Information for earlier years is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Domestic Rates

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what will be the level of relief for domestic rates in Northern Ireland in consequence of the application of the poll tax in Great Britain in the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The statutory rule which will give effect to the 1992-93 regional rate for Northern Ireland and to the reduction for domestic ratepayers will be laid before Parliament in early March, in accordance with the normal timetable.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total number of employees in his Department; and how many are *(a)* black and *(b)* disabled.

Dr. Mawhinney: On 30 November 1991 there were 29,860 people in the non-industrial grades of the Northern Ireland civil service and 213 members of the home civil service working in the Northern Ireland Office.

There were 1,284 staff in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (4·3 per cent. of the service) who self-reported a disability. Of these, 431 (1·4 per cent. of the service) were, or had been, registered as disabled. In addition, 35 registered disabled people were working in the Northern Ireland civil service under the sheltered placement scheme. There were no registered disabled staff in the Northern Ireland Office.

The Race Relations Act 1976 does not apply to Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland civil service does not, therefore, monitor the ethnic origin of staff. The 109 London-based staff of the Northern Ireland Office have, however, been invited to take part in an ethnic monitoring survey and, of those who responded, 4 described themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mortgage Possession Orders

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his answer of 21 February, *Official Report*, columns *321-22*, for what reason the number of mortgage possession orders made in Coventry court in 1991 exceeded the number of actions entered.

The Attorney-General: A greater number of orders made over actions entered is not necessarily an indication of error, since some of the orders will relate to actions entered during the previous year. However, the figures given in my answer to the hon. Member on 21 February were provisional and stated to be so. On checking the figures again, it has been established that the data given for orders made erroneously included rent actions. The figures have now been revised and the total number of actions entered and orders made, whilst still provisional, should now read 1,256 and 1,202 respectively.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Attorney-General if he will publish a table showing the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women *(x)* in his Department and *(y)* in the Lord Chancellor's Department in each of grades (i) 1, (ii) 2, (iii) 3, (iv) 4, (v) 5, (vi) 6, (vii) 7, (viii) SEO, (ix) HEO, (x) administrative trainee, (xi) EO, (xii) CO and (xiii) CA.

The Attorney-General: The information requested is set out in the tables.

(X) Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers

	(a) Men	*(b) Women*
Grade 1	—	—
2	—	—
3	—	1
4	2	—
5	3	—
6	2	1
7	—	1
SEO	—	—
HEO	1	—
Administration trainee	—	—
EO	2	—
AO	1	1
AA	—	1

(X) Treasury Solicitor's Department

	(a) Men	*(b) Women*
Grade 1	1	—
2	1	—
3	9	—
4	2	—
5	35	7
6	50	11
7	59	29
SEO	8	3
HEO	22	9
Administration trainee	—	—
EO	27	40
AO	26	41
AA	4	4

(X) Crown Prosecution Service

Grade	*(a) Men*	*(b) Women*
1	—	—
2	1	—
3	5	—
4	9	—
5	55	2
6	165	23
7	27	5
SEO	84	32
HEO	127	174
Administration trainee	—	—
EO	362	809
AO	334	954
AA	124	312

(X) Serious Fraud Office

Grade	*(a) Men*	*(b) Women*
1	—	—
2	—	1
3	1	—
4	—	—
5	7	1
6	7	4
7	7	1
SEO	7	1
HEO	14	5
Administration trainee	—	—
EO	7	11
AO	9	13
AA	—	—

(Y) Lord Chancellor's Department

Grade	*(a) Men*	*(b) Women*
1	1	—
2	2	—
3	11	—
4	5	—
5	27	2
6	55·5	19·5
7	123	42·5
SEO	225	85
HEO	522	417·5

Grade	(a) Men	(b) Women
AT/HEOD	5	4
EO	556·5	1,185·5
AO	9,655	2,949
AA	195	511·5

(A) The figures are based on full-time equivalents, ie part-time staff count as ·5.
(B) Figures for grades 6 and 7 include figures for grade equivalents.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Attorney-General what is the total number of employees in *(a)* the Lord Chancellor's Department and *(b)* his Department; and how many are (i) black and (ii) disabled.

The Attorney-General: The total number of staff in *(a)* the Lord Chancellor's Department is 11,923. The total numbers of staff in my Departments *(b)* are:

Department	Numbers
Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers	23
Treasury Solicitor's Department	474
Crown Prosecution Service	5,758
Serious Fraud Office	129

In the Lord Chancellor's Department 8,674 staff responded to an ethnic origin survey, and of these 622 were black or belonged to other ethnic minorities. As at 1 June 1991 the Lord Chacellor's Department had 171 staff who are registered as disabled.

In the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers there are no black or registered disabled staff. In the Treasury Solicitor's Department there are 80 staff who are black or belong to other ethnic minorities. The Treasury Solicitor's Department had four members of staff who are registered as disabled.

In the Crown prosecution service, 4,012 staff responded to an ethnic origin survey, and of these 248 were black or belonged to other ethnic minorities. As at 31 August 1991 the Crown prosecution service had 40 staff who are registered as disabled.

The Serious Fraud Office has 17 staff who are black or belong to other ethnic minorities, but no employees who are registered as disabled.

Stefan Kiszko

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General why the results of the sperm test on Stefan Kiszko carried out by Dr. Edward Tierney were not disclosed to the defence at the time of his trial.

The Attorney-General: The sample of semen obtained by Dr. Tierney from Stefan Kiszko was submitted to the forensic science laboratory for examination. The Director of Public Prosecutions was provided with a witness statement made by the scientist concerned with the test and that statement was served as part of the committal document. The statement concluded withh an assertion that the maker had

"found nothing else of evidential value"

and the Director of Public Prosecutions relied upon that assertion. So far as can be ascertained from the DPP's case file, no information was received by his staff to put them on notice that further material evidence was in fact available. The conduct of the original inquiry is currently under investigation by the Lancashire police.

SCOTLAND

Ambulance Services

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give, for the Scottish Ambulance Service, Greater Glasgow area, the success rate in percentage terms of achieving its ORCON standards for *(a)* reaction to a 999 call and *(b)* reaching the site.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The current rates of achievement for the Greater Glasgow area are:

Emergency calls	Percentage of calls
Activation time	83 per cent. of calls within three minutes
Reaching scene	81 per cent. of calls within 14 minutes

The target for such calls is 95 per cent. and I have asked the general manager of the Scottish Ambulance Service to review the situation. In addition I am making an extra £250,000 available to the ambulance service in Glasgow specifically to help improve the success rate in response times.

European Community Food Surpluses

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the procedures for distributing EC food surpluses to voluntary organisations in Scotland; and what action is being taken to ensure that such voluntary organisations are made fully aware of the availability of EC surplus food and are encouraged to assist in its distribution to those most in need.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In reply to a question from the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison), my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced on 26 February, *Official Report*, column *507-8*, the arrangements for operating the European Community surplus food scheme in the United Kingdom in 1992. Agriculture departments will shortly be inviting charitable and other non-profit making organisations wishing to take part to apply by 10 April for designation to distribute food. The details were set out in a joint agriculture departments press release. In addition to that publicity, the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department will be writing to all bodies participating in the 1991 scheme or which have expressed an interest in the 1992 scheme.

Speech Therapy

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what level of resources have been allocated for speech therapy for children in Scotland with a formal statement of needs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 26 February 1992]:* General responsibility for the speech therapy needs of children in Scotland rests with health boards. Financial provision is made within the overall moneys made available to support their programmes, but the element devoted to speech therapy provision is not separately identified.

Additionally, education authorities have a responsibility to provide for speech therapy which is identified as a special educational need in a record of needs. Under new arrangements, which will begin on 1 April 1992, education authorities will contract directly with health boards for the

provision of this service. The sum of £2 million has been included in the 1992-93 local government settlement to take account of the additional expenditure authorities will incur.

WALES

Home Ownership Schemes

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many properties have been removed from the public sector via shared ownership schemes by each local authority in Wales in each year since 1988.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Since 1988, one dwelling has been sold to the private sector under section 143 of the Housing Act 1985. This occurred in Alyn and Deeside in 1990.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the proportion of local authority revenue expenditure in Wales financed by *(a)* Government grant, *(b)* non-domestic rates and *(c)* local domestic taxation in each year from 1978-79 to 1990-91 and estimates for 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information available is given in the table. Prior to 1981-82 there was no separate rate support grant system for Wales and so figures are not available.

Financing of local authority revenue expenditure[1]

per cent.

	Government grants[2]	*Non-domestic rates*[3]	*Domestic rates/ community charges*[4]
1981-82	71	19	12
1982-83	71	18	13
1983-84	71	17	11
1984-85	71	17	11
1985-86	70	18	12
1986-87	69	19	13
1987-88	69	19	13
1988-89	67	19	14
1989-90	65	19	15
1990-91[5]	62	20	17
1991-92[5]	72	21	6
1992-93[6]	72	21	7

[1] The percentages do not add to 100 per cent. for technical reasons; these include rounding and authorities' use of balances. Local authority revenue expenditure is defined here (i) prior to 1990-91 as "relevant" expenditure plus expenditure on certain non-relevant items such as net expenditure on mandatory student awards (ii) for 1990-91 onwards as revenue expenditure "on a Total Standard Spending basis".

[2] Prior to 1990-91 comprises rate support grant, specific and supplementary grants within aggregate Exchequer grant, domestic rate relief grant and rate rebate grants. For 1990-91 onwards comprises revenue support grant, specific and supplementary grants within aggregate external finance, community charge benefit grant, transitional relief/community/charge reduction scheme grants and community charge grant (1991-92).

[3] Prior to 1990-91 rate income, net of rebates. For 1990-91 onwards the distributable amount.

[4] Prior to 1990-91 rate income net of domestic rate relief grant and rate rebates. For 1990-91 onwards net of community charge benefit grant, transitional relief/community charge reduction scheme grants and community charge grant (1991-92).

[5] Provisional.

[6] 1992-93 settlement.

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the total of local government *(a)* revenue and *(b)* capital expenditure by local government within Wales for each year from 1978-79 to 1991-92 (estimated).

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information available is given in the table. Revenue expenditure figures are not available on a comparable basis prior to 1981-82.

£ million

	Revenue expenditure[1]	*Capital expenditure*[2]
1978-79	n/a	201·7
1979-80	n/a	241·8
1980-81	n/a	271·4
1981-82	1,117·1	244·4
1982-83	1,207·2	344·9
1983-84	1,267·3	413·9
1984-85	1,304·0	358·4
1985-86	1,352·8	343·2
1986-87	1,463·1	413·7
1987-88	1,567·0	499·1
1988-89	1,711·6	510·4
1989-90	1,847·4	644·9
1990-91[3]	2,086·1	584·3
1991-92[3]	2,324·1	648·6

[1] Prior to 1990-91 total expenditure for block grant purposes; for 1990-91 onwards new net revenue expenditure including community council expenditure. Whilst these two definitions are similar (for example, both are net of specific and supplementary grants) they are not directly comparable.

[2] Capital expenditure charged to the capital account.

[3] Provisional.

Building Schemes

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many properties have been developed under *(a)* building for sale schemes and *(b)* building under licence schemes in each local authority area in Wales in each year since 1988.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information on dwellings built by local authorities for sale is collected at the time of sale. Numbers of dwellings built under licence relate to those intended to be built at the time of disposal of land to the private developer and have been collected centrally only since the third quarter of 1990. Recorded activity since 1988 is given in the table:

	Building for sale				*Building under licence*	
	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1990*[1]	*1991*
Alyn and Deeside	—	—	—	22	—	—
South Pembrokeshire	—	—	—	—	18	—
Cardiff	—	—	—	—	7	—

Source: Welsh Office housing returns.

[1] Data for the last two quarters.

Health Service Staff

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number of people employed by the NHS in Wales on a full-time and part-time basis.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The latest available data, as at 30 September 1990 for medical and dental staff and 31 January 1992 for non-medical and dental staff, show that there were 72,146 staff employed by the NHS in Wales —including the Welsh Health Commons Services Authority but excluding staff in Gwent and South Glamorgan family health services authorities which are not on the payroll system for which this information is derived—this amounted to 117 staff as at 31 December 1991—the full and part time split is not held centrally. Of these 44,547 were full time and 27,599 were part time.

Welsh Language Teachers

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Welsh language teachers there were in each county in the Welsh education system in the years 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Due to the organisation of the curriculum in primary schools, teachers of the Welsh language cannot be separately identified. The number of Welsh language teachers in secondary schools is available only from the 1989 secondary school staffing survey and relates to that year. The information is given in the table.

Number of teachers teaching the Welsh language in secondary schools in 1989[1]

	Welsh language teachers
Clwyd	134
Dyfed	178
Gwent	16
Gwynedd	199
Mid Glamorgan	153
Powys	54
South Glamorgan	76
West Glamorgan	105
Wales	915

[1] *Source:* Secondary school staffing survey, March 1989.

HEALTH

Dentists

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement explaining the circumstances in which dentists have been advised that their payments are to be reduced by 13 per cent.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to vary the national health service fees paid to general dental practitioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The proposed increase in target net income of 8·5 per cent. which was recommended by the Doctors and Dentists Remuneration Review Body was accepted by the Government. To ensure that the level at which fees are pitched in the coming year will deliver this proposed increase in dentists' net income, the health departments consulted the British Dental Association (BDA). Because of evidence of overpayments resulting from this year's level of fees, which suggest that on average dentists would be paid far more than the intended target gross income, the Government suggested an interim fee reduction from 1 April. Following discussions with the BDA and the health departments agreement was reached to suspend the reduction in fees proposed for 1 April. The health departments and the BDA will also hold a joint enquiry to review the level of payments to dentists in 1991-92; simultaneously, they will begin a more fundamental review of the structure of dentists' remuneration.

Health Service Staff

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of people employed by the NHS in England on a full-time and part-time basis.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At 30 September 1990, the latest date for which figures are held centrally, there were 585,300 full-time employees and 358,700 part-time employees.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the increase of staff in district health authorities since April 1989.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Figures at April 1989 are not available. The increase between September 1989 and September 1990, the latest date for which figures are held centrally, was 900 whole-time equivalents (0·1 per cent.). Over the same period there was an overall decrease of 200 whole-time equivalents in the NHS.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of the campaign to recruit nurses in each of the last five years; and whether a similar campaign to recruit social service staff will be run.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The cost of the nurse recruitment campaigns in England in each of the last five years was:

	£
1986-87	1,126,770
1987-88	832,494
1988-89	2,338,093
1989-90	4,183,780
1990-91	3,367,420

We have no plans for a campaign by the Department to recruit social service staff. It is for local authorities, as employers in the personal social services field, to take the lead in securing the provision of an adequate work force. We did however hold a seminar in March 1991 with the Association of Directors of Social Services and the local government management board on manpower planning and work force analysis issues. The Department is also funding a major programme of research on social services work force issues at the National Institute for Social Work.

Food Poisoning

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of cases notified to him for 1991 in each health region for *(a)* food poisoning in general, *(b)* salmonella, *(c)* salmonella enteritidis, *(d)* salmonella enteritidis phage 4, *(e)* salmonella typhimurium, *(f)* campylobacter and *(g)* listeriosis.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

The data show notifications of food poisoning to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and laboratory reports of specific organisms to the Public Health Laboratory Service's communicable disease surveillance centre.

Drug Addiction

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his most recent estimate of totals of people in Great Britain who are addicted to drugs as a result of *(a)* the use of illegal drugs and *(b)* the use of medicinal products.

Mr. Dorrell: The Home Office maintains an addicts index which indicates the number of people notified by doctors as dependent on a range of drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. The number of new and existing drug addicts in Great Britain notified to the addicts index was 17,716 in 1990, the latest year for which figures are available.

Regional health authorities in England and health authorities in Wales and Scotland are now implementing a drug misuse database which will provide data on drug users starting a new episode of treatment at services in any six-month period. This will provide anonymised data on a wider range of drugs than the Home Office addicts index and will include information on the use of some medicinal products, such as benzodiazepines. Some regions now have this information available and it is hoped that information for Great Britain will be available next year.

Hospital Cleaning Services

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what national guidelines have been issued to district health authorities about quality of service expected from private contractors for cleaning services in hospitals; and when these guidelines were last reviewed.

Mr. Dorrell: The responsibility for specifying service requirements and quality standards for cleaning services in the NHS rests with the relevant local health authority. They are also responsible for monitoring performance to ensure the required quality standards are met.

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the expenditure and achievements of his Department in North Yorkshire during 1991; and what was the comparable position between June 1979 and May 1980.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* For the financial year 1979-80, the annual accounts of the North Yorkshire area health authority show total revenue expenditure of £60·4 million (cash) and capital expenditure attributable to the authority amounted to £2·8 million (cash).

In 1990-91, the annual accounts of the four successor district health authorities show total revenue expenditure of £165·8 million (cash), with capital expenditure totalling £16·7 million (cash).

These figures represent real-terms increases (measured at 1991-92 prices) of 26·3 per cent. for revenue expenditure and 173·3 per cent. for capital expenditure.

Between 1979 and 1990-91 in York health authority the number of patients treated is shown in the table:

York Health District

	[1]1979	[1]1980	[2]1990-91	Percentage change 1979 to 1990-91	Percentage change 1980 to 1990-91
In-patients	27,296	28,085	39,530	29·6	26·0
Day cases	4,444	4,658	5,425	22·1	16·5
Out-patients	157,451	162,638	172,133	9·3	5·8

[1] In-patients: discharges and deaths.
[2] In-patients: finished consultant episodes.
Percentage change in in-patient figures 1979 to 1990-91 and 1980 to 1990-91 on comparative basis.
1990-91 figures provisional.

Private Health Insurance

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state for each year since 1978 the percentage of the population covered by private health insurance.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 February 1992]:* The information is given in the table.

Year	Persons Insured/ millionss	UK Population/ millions	Percentage insured
1978	2·4	56·2	4·3
1979	2·7	56·2	4·8
1980	3·6	56·3	6·4
1981	4·1	56·4	7·3
1982	4·2	56·3	7·5
1983	4·3	56·3	7·6
[1]1984	4·4	56·5	7·8
1985	5·0	56·6	8·8
1986	5·3	56·8	9·3
1987	5·3	56·9	9·3
[2]1988	6·8	57·1	11·9
1989	7·2	57·2	12·6
1990	7·6	57·4	13·2

[1]The basis of collection was changed from 1984. Figures to 1984 are for the three main provident insurers. Figures from 1985 onward include all companies.
[2]In 1988, 900,000 people covered by the Post Office and Civil Service Sanatorium Society, were included for the first time.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total number of employees in his Ministry; and how many are *(a)* black and *(b)* disabled.

Mr. Curry: Figures taken from a survey covering 92·2 per cent. of our 10,048 non-industrial work force, with part-timers counting as one, show 416 staff to be of ethnic minority origin. The Department employs 141½ staff who are registered as disabled. This figure covers both non-industrial and industrial grades but does not include staff with disabilities who have chosen not to register and counts part-time staff as half units.

EC Grant Aid

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total amount of EC grant aid that has been given to the salmon industry in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the remainder of the EC since 1973.

Mr. Curry: EC grant aid to the salmon industry in the United Kingdom since 1973 has totalled over £13·6 million. Figures for Community aid granted specifically to the salmon industry in the rest of the EC are not available.

Less-favoured Areas

Mr. Amos: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the total level of present and planned spending on each of the schemes available to farmers in the less-favoured areas for capital, environmental and other grant aid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The forecast outturn of expenditure by the Ministry in 1991-92 on payments to farmers in the less-favoured areas (LFAs) in England on capital, environmental and other grant schemes is set out in the following table. The table also sets out estimates of the sums likely to be spent under those schemes in the LFAs in the years 1992-93 to 1994-95. Except in the case of environmentally sensitive areas (ESAs) these estimates have been arrived at by applying the latest information on spend in the LFAs to the planning totals for future years. The planning totals do not hypothecate expenditure between particular parts of the country, nor in the case of capital grant, between particular types of investment. As regards ESAs, as the hon. Member will be aware, an expansion of the scheme is in train. It is not possible therefore to apply historic data to planning totals to produce estimates of future spend in the LFAs. For forward years, therefore, figures for planned expenditure on the scheme as a whole are given.

£ million

Scheme	*1991-92*[1]	*1992-93*[2]	*1993-94*[2]	*1994-95*[2]
F and CGS	5·3	5·4	5·8	6·1
FDGS[3]	1·6	1·5	1·2	1·2
Set Aside	0·2	0·3	0·3	0·3
FWS/FWPS	0·03	0·04	0·06	0·09
ESAs	2·8	21·5	37·4	44·9

Notes:

[1] Estimated Outturn.

[2] Estimated expenditure based on planning totals.

[3] Statistics for the farm diversification grant scheme figures do not distinguish between LFA and non-LFA. The figures given are for total expenditure in MAFF Divisions covering LFA areas.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much assistance has been given to farmers in the less-favoured areas in Northumberland in 1979, 1987 and the latest year for which figures are available, under each of the hill livestock compensatory allowance, suckler cow and other schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Information for the area requested is available only for the hill livestock compensatory allowances scheme:

	£ million
1979	2·288
1987	4·669
1991	6·008

Mr. Amos: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current level of hill livestock compensatory allowance and suckler cow premium payments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies given to my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) and my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) on 11 February 1992, *Official Report*, column *496-98*.

ENERGY

Electricity Cables

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will estimate the cost of placing electricity cables underground compared with pylons; and what measures he is taking to encourage more electricity cables to be laid below ground.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The cost of placing electricity cables underground compared with overhead lines is a matter for the National Grid Company and the regional electricity companies, but for high voltage lines is approximately between nine and 10 times more expensive. All new overhead lines require a consent under section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 and, in considering applications, the Secretary of State must have regard to the preservation of amenity.

Environmental Assessments

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on his policy on making environmental assessments for proposed energy policies, programmes and projects.

Mr. Wakeham: My ministerial colleagues and I give full weight to environmental factors when considering such proposals. In preparing their advice on proposals my officials take account, where appropriate, of the guidance set out in the Department of the Environment's guide on "Policy Appraisal and the Environment". The Department's report on the Government's expenditure plans within the energy sector 1992-93 to 1994-95 included

an account of the environmental aspects of the Department's activities. The departmental objectives as set out in that report have recently been extended to make clear our intention of seeking to ensure that environmental aspects are properly recognised in all areas of the Department's work.

THORP

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to the oral answer to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), *Official Report*, 24 February, column 674, on the thermal oxide reprocessing plant, he will set out *(a)* the proportion of the 30 tonnes of plutonium estimated to be recovered from reprocessing at THORP by the year 2000 that will arise from imported foreign spent fuel, *(b)* what safeguards will apply to the recovered plutonium and who will pay for the safeguards and *(c)* what arrangements exist for the return of the plutonium to the country of origin in terms of technical capability and treaty agreements.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: British Nuclear Fuels plc (BNFL) estimates that, by the year 2000, some 80 per cent. of the plutonium recovered during reprocessing in THORP will arise from spent fuel owned by overseas customers. This plutonium will be subject to Eurotom safeguards and to the terms of the appropriate safeguards agreements signed by the United Kingdom and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The recovery of BNFL's costs arising from safeguards on its facilities is a commercial matter for the company. Costs of inspection and related activities are met by Eurotom and the IAEA.

Plutonium arising from reprocessing in THORP is transferred overseas only subject to the application of safeguards and on receipt of assurances covering peaceful use, physical protection and controls on re-transfer.

IAEA

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proposals to strengthen international nuclear safeguards have been submitted by the United Kingdom's ambassador to the board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency for the agency's high level review of safeguards which began on 24 February.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The United Kingdom is a party to the proposals by the twelve EC member states for strengthening IAEA safeguards. These proposals were included in a statement made by the Netherlands on behalf of the EC and its member states to the general conference of the IAEA in September 1991: a copy of the statement has been placed in the Library of the House. The proposals are being fully explored in the board of governors of the IAEA.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the reason Her Majesty's Government has not paid in full the Kingdom's 1992 contribution to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In accordance with normal Government practice, the United Kingdom's 1992 contribution to the International Atomic Energy Agency will be paid at the beginning of the United Kingdom's next financial year.

Consultants

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list those parts of his Department, including executive agencies, carrying out reviews over the last 12 months into the pay and grading of staff and the firm of consultants engaged, where appropriate.

Mr. Wakeham: No reviews into the pay and grading of staff in my Department have been carried out in the past 12 months.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nagorno Karabakh

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Armenian and Azerbaijani Governments about the situation in Nagorno Karabakh; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The British Government are playing a full part in encouraging the international community to promote a peaceful settlement. We will continue to urge all involved in the dispute to settle this matter in accordance with international law and with full respect for human rights and conference on security and co-operation in Europe—CSCE—principles. However, the roots of the dispute in Nagorno Karabakh are deep and a lasting peace will not be achieved easily.

We have raised with our European Community, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and CSCE partners our concern at the deteriorating situation. The Portuguese ambassador in Moscow, acting on behalf of the Twelve European Community Governments, made a demarche on 20 January to the representatives in Moscow of Armenia and Azerbaijan and to the Russian Foreign Ministry calling on all concerned to work towards a peaceful settlement of this dispute.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs reiterated this point in a recent telephone conversation with the Armenian Foreign Minister, Mr. Hovanissian, and in Moscow last month he used the opportunity of his meeting with the Russian Foreign Minister to encourage the Russians to do what they could to help find a solution to the dispute.

In response to a British proposal, the CSCE Council of Ministers agreed on 31 January to send a mission to Armenia and Azerbaijan, including Nagorno Karabakh, to report on the situation. The team, which included a British representative, visited the region from 12 to 18 February. Its report and recommendations are being considered by the CSCE's committee of senior officials in Prague. CSCE countries will then consider how to carry the process forward using CSCE mechanisms.

We welcome the agreement to call for a ceasefire and to set up working groups which was announced after the trilateral meeting with representatives of Armenia and Azerbaijan convened by the Russian Foreign Minister on 20 February. However, since then there have been further reports of casualties in clashes in Nagorno Karabakh. There is a clear risk of a further deterioration in the situation. It is therefore important that the agreement reached in Moscow be backed up by immediate concrete action to prevent further tragic deaths.

Embassy Cars

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list British embassies that previously qualified for a Rolls-Royce ambassadorial car, but now no longer do so; and if he will list the replacement vehicles.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The table lists posts which, in 1984, qualified for a Rolls-Royce ambassadorial car and which no longer do so.

Replacement Car	*Post*
To be decided (Rolls-Royce provided in 1990)	Canberra
Range Rover	Moscow
Lincoln Town Car	New York (UN)

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will indicate the type, cost and specification of the next official car for Her Majesty's ambassador to the United Nations.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: A standard specification Lincoln town car to be leased at an annual cost of US $5,900—about £3,410 at the current exchange rate—including maintenance and insurance.

Eastern Europe

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the new organisational structure within his Department for dealing with Eastern Europe and the area covered by the former Soviet Union.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Relations with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Yugoslavia, Croatia, Slovenia and Albania are handled by the central European department. Relations with the States formerly in the Soviet Union are handled by the eastern department. Both departments have been reinforced to take account of changes within these areas. The joint assistance unit was created in 1989 to administer the know-how fund, and has been increased over the past year to deal with important additional work in the former Soviet Union.

Hong Kong (Ivory)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current number of possession licences issued to holders of ivory stocks in Hong Kong.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As at 26 February 1992, there were 963 possession licences held by commercial stockholders in Hong Kong.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of items from endangered species seized by the Hong Kong authorities in 1991 and the prosecution arising from such seizures.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In 1991, the Hong Kong authorities seized a variety of specimens of endangered species from which 109 prosecutions arose.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if any exports of ivory from Hong Kong have been authorised since 17 October 1990.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No commercial exports of ivory have been authorised by the Hong Kong authorities between 17 October 1990 and 25 February 1992 except for two pre-convention specimens of worked ivory of 0·1 kg each.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of ivory exported from Hong Kong during 1991.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No commercial exports of ivory have been authorised by the Hong Kong authorities in 1991 except for one pre-convention specimen of 0·1 kg.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current quantity of all ivory known to be held in Hong Kong; and on what date it was last assessed.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The total commercial ivory stock held in Hong Kong on 17 July 1990 was 463 tonnes to the nearest tonne. No commercial exports of ivory have been authorised between then and 25 February 1992 except for two pre-convention specimens of worked ivory of 0·1 kg each.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many spot checks were made by the Hong Kong authorities of ivory-holding premises *(a)* since 19 October 1990 and *(b)* during 1991; and if any irregularities were discovered.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Hong Kong authorities have made 354 spot checks on ivory holding premises between 17 October 1990 and 25 February 1992 of which 220 were conducted during 1991. No irregularities were discovered.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of ivory exported from Hong Kong since 25 March 1991.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No commercial exports of ivory have been authorised by the Hong Kong authorities in 1991 except for one pre-convention specimen of 0·1 kg.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of any ivory confiscated by the Hong Kong authorities since *(a)* 17 October 1990 and *(b)* 31 January 1991; and if any prosecutions for illegal export have been entered since each of those dates.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Between 17 October 1990 and 25 February 1992, the Hong Kong authorities confiscated 181·36 kg of ivory. Between 31 January 1991 and 25 February 1992 they confiscated 162·30 kg of ivory. During the first period, two prosecutions for illegal export were entered and during the second period, one such prosecution was entered.

Nuclear Waste, Russia

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he intends to make to the Russian Federation on the dumping of nuclear waste, from the Soviet fleet berthed at Murmansk, off the island of Novaya Zemlya.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Government are concerned about environmental issues related to nuclear waste, and

the operation and safety of nuclear plant in Russia. We have had discussions with the Russian Government already on these matters; and will ensure that our concerns about these recent reports are made clear to the Russian authorities.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community's Council of Ministers.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Foreign Affairs Council will meet on 2 March. The Council may review the European economic area agreement in the light of the Commission's request to the European Court of Justice for a second opinion on the compatibility of the revised draft agreement with the the treaty of Rome. The Council will consider relations with the former Soviet Union and will discuss the progress of negotiations in the GATT—general agreement on tariffs and trade—Uruguay round. The new Mediterranean policy will also be discussed by the Council which will prepare the Community position for the fifth meeting of the EC-Tunisia Co-operation Council to be held later that day. The Council will consider the Commission's future financing proposals for 1993 to 1997. Ministers will discuss a number of European political co-operation topics during lunch, including probably Yugoslavia, the Commonwealth of Independent States, Zaire and aspects of the arrangements for a Common foreign and security policy.

The Agriculture Council will also meet on 2 and 3 and, possibly, 4 March. Ministers will discuss reform of the common agricultural policy and agricultural aspects of the GATT Uruguay round. They may also discuss inward processing of milk products and olive oil control agencies.

The Economic and Finance Council will meet on 16 March. Following the agreement reached on European Investment Bank lending at the July ECOFIN the Council will now consider the detailed terms and conditions under which lending will take place. The Council may also consider the Court of Auditors' report on the implementation of the 1990 Community budget, and communicate an opinion to the European Parliament. The Commission's proposals for the future financing of the Community may also be considered. The Council may also discuss the investment services directive, the large exposure directive and the capital adequacy directive. The Council will also discuss the draft seventh VAT directive on the sale of second-hand goods, works of art, antiques and collectors' items, and the draft directives for the harmonisation of excise duty structures on tobacco and mineral oil products.

The Environment Council will meet on 23 March. It may agree to the proposed Council regulation on the supervision and control of waste shipments, and a directive on the sulphur content of gasoil. Ministers are also likely to discuss directives on air pollution caused by ground level ozone, minimum standards for keeping animals in zoos, the reduction and elimination of pollution caused by waste from the titanium oxide industry, and the United Nations conference on environmental development. If it is published in time, Ministers may also discuss the fifth environmental action programme.

The Transport Council will meet on 26 and 27 March. Ministers' discussion will concentrate on liberalisation issues including: road haulage cabotage, passenger transport cabotage, maritime cabotage and the third aviation package. They may also discuss the general framework for external relations and inland transport market observation.

The Agriculture Council will meet on 30 and 31 March. Ministers will discuss agricultural price fixing, wild game meat, fruit plants and vegetable plants. They may also discuss common agricultural policy reform, agricultural aspects of the GATT Uruguay round, and milk products.

The Internal Market Council will meet on 31 March. It is likely to discuss rational use of medicines, pharmaceutical advertising and vehicle type approval. It may also consider frontier controls, trans-European networks, drug precursors and scientific co-operation on foodstuffs.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Overseas Investment

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will list the major investment projects attracted from overseas to the northern region since *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1983 and *(c)* 1987, together with the capital costs of each project and the amount of grant offered.

Mr. Leigh: Details of major investments known to have located in the northern region since 1979 are listed. All these projects are known to have capital costs in excess of £5 million and all were assisted by grants of regional selective assistance. Comparable information on other forms of assistance is not readily available. The information is set out in the required chronological order and is based on when regional selective assistance was offered.

Major Inward Investment in the Northern Region

Company	*Project Cost (£'000)*	*RSA Grant (£'000)*
1 January 1979 to 31 December 1982		
Eimco (GB) Ltd.	5,426	666
Kimberly-Clark Ltd.	26,787	1,350
3M UK Holdings Plc	8,414	650
Black and Decker	6,418	950
Coles Cranes Ltd.	12,445	1,582
Formica Ltd.	7,759	500
Rohm and Haas (UK) Ltd.	7,219	575
Union Camp Corp. (USA)	6,318	300
Fisher Price Toys	12,816	2,385
DJB Eng. Ltd.	9,131	1,450
Yates Circuit Foil Ltd.	10,616	250
Albright and Wilson Ltd.	5,550	750
1 January 1983 to 31 December 1986		
Kodak Ltd.	61,044	2,000
Transfer-All Purpose Foils Ltd.	5,344	819
Forbo-Mayfair Ltd.	6,500	700
Black and Decker	9,910	2,000
THC Fabricators (UK) Ltd.	6,151	575
Philips Components Ltd.	9,909	900
Black and Decker	22,000	2,450
Komatsu Ltd.	16,449	1,200
NSK Bearings Europe Ltd.	32,000	1,600
TC Industries of Europe Ltd.	5,970	1,295
Tolaram Polymers Ltd.	14,377	350
Nissan UK Ltd.	349,900	35,000
NSK Bearings Europe Ltd.	15,093	450
Black and Decker	9,760	1,000
1 January 1987 to 31 Janaury 1992		
British Alcan Aluminimum Plc	7,000	2,000

Company	Project Cost (£'000)	RSA Grant (£'000)
Sterling-Winthorp Group Ltd.	15,115	3,382
Key-Tech (Europe) Ltd.	11,288	1,200
Swaddlers Ltd.	8,780	950
Newcastle Chronicle and Journal Ltd.	5,372	700
Fujitsu Microelectronics Ltd.	400,000	30,000
Swilynn (UK) Ltd.	14,145	2,950
Nissan UK Manufacturing Ltd.	216,000	14,400
Cookson Fukuda Ltd.	24,318	650
Hashimoto Ltd.	9,850	1,500
3M UK Ltd.	11,882	1,700
TRW Thompson	30,300	4,500
Marley Kansei Ltd.	7,694	846
Schurpack UK Ltd.	6,235	850
MAS Electronics Ltd.	8,615	1,700

Note:
1. Major inward investment projects have been defined as those first time investments, or expansions of existing investments, by foreign owned companies which involve project costs in excess of £5 million.
2. Details of grant are for offers of regional selective assistance (RSA) accepted by foreign owned companies since 1 January 1979.
3. The Northern region is the north-east region plus Cumbria.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish a table showing the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in his Department in each of grades (i) 1, (ii) 2, (iii) 3, (iv) 4, (v) 5, (vi) 6, (vii) 7, (viii) SEO, (ix) HEO, (x) administrative trainee, (xi) EO, (xii) CO and (xiii) CA.

Mr. Leigh: The information requested is in the table.

Headcount of staff in the Department of Trade and Industry by grade level and gender at 1 April 1991.

	Men	Women
Grade 1	1	0
Grade 2	12	0
Grade 3	49	4
Grade 4	11	2
Grade 5	217	31
Grade 6	176	19
Grade 7	1,031	141
SEO	851	130
HEO	1,335	513
Administrative Trainee (AT)	6	4
EO (excluding AT)	1,300	959
AO	1,152	1,990
AA	856	2,038

These figures include 84 men and 890 women who are part-time.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the total number of employees in his Department; and how many are *(a)* black and *(b)* disabled.

Mr. Leigh: The Department employs 13,056 staff, including industrial staff, of whom:

(a) 1,111 are known to be black. 81 per cent. of the Department's employees have declared their ethnic origin.

(b) 184 are known to be disabled. This figure includes both registered and unregistered disabled officers.

These figures are based on staff employed at 1 April 1991.

Staffing and Budgets

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give full details of the numbers of staff and budget for each of the last 13 years allocated to the fairs and promotions branch.

Mr. Sainsbury: The table shows the average number of staff in post in fairs and promotions branch from 1986-87 to 1990-91 together with the branch running and programme costs for those years based on current prices. Figures for prior years are not available.

Financial year	Average staff in post	Branch running costs £ million	Net programme spend £ million
1986-87	160	2·7	14·0
1987-88	162	2·9	14·0
1988-89	159	3·2	17·4
1989-90	160	3·5	19·6
1990-91	160	3·8	19·6

Internal Market Council

Mr. Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Internal Market Council held in Brussels on 25 February.

Mr. Leigh: I attended the Internal Market Council on 25 February.

The Council quickly reached agreement on a decision to set up a programme of research in the important area of security of information held in electronic form, ie on computers.

Following delivery of the European Parliament's opinion, the Council also agreed a common position on the third non-life insurance directive. This directive allows insurers access to European Community markets on the basis of a home state authorisation, and opens up opportunities for the United Kingdom insurance industry.

There was a lengthy discussion of the Commission proposals to control trade in cultural goods. Greece, Spain and Italy argued that the proposals should be widened in scope, and are clearly concerned that the removal of border controls will make it easier to transfer nationally important works of art out of their countries of origin. Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Denmark all argued to the contrary, that the scope of the proposals should be more narrowly focused to avoid undue interference in the healthy and legitimate international art market.

The Commission introduced a discussion on border controls within the Community. In discussion, all member states agreed on the need for further work to enable controls on goods to be removed. The Council also discussed the effect that the removal of border controls will have on firms of independent customs agents, but reached no conclusion.

Finally, the Commission gave a short presentation on trans-European networks, which cover energy, transport and communications. There was no discussion of this item.

Vehicles (Recycling)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met representatives of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders to discuss progress made in promoting the recyclability of motor vehicles.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 27 February 1992]:* My right hon. Friend is due to meet shortly with representatives of the motor industry and others to discuss vehicle recycling issues.

DEFENCE

Underground Nuclear Explosions

Mr. Flynn To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the paper on seismic monitoring by Professor Alan Douglas of his Department's verification centre at Blacknest, given to the seminar on the detection and recognition of underground nuclear explosions held at the Geological Society, London, on 14 February.

Mr Archie Hamilton: I have arranged for a pre-publication copy of the paper given by Professor Alan Douglas at the Geological Society on 14 February to be placed in the Library. This copy consists of the illustrations presented together with an explanatory commentary. A more comprehensive version of the paper is to be published, by the Royal Astronomical Society, in the symposium proceedings which will be available later in the year. When the published proceedings are available a copy will be placed in the Library.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide the statistical results of the monitoring of low flying by *(a)* covert deployments of RAF police and *(b)* Skyguard radars by year, for the last five years.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Covert deployments of RAF police, including those using the Skyguard radar system, have shown the consistent respect of aircrew for the low-flying regulations. It is not our practice to comment on the detailed findings of these surveys.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of the 22 January, *Official Report*, columns *236-37*, if he can yet give the figures for the month of December 1991 in respect of listing the numbers of low-flying sorties by aircraft type.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The number of low-flying sorties by aircraft type carried out in the United Kingdom for December 1991 is:

Low-flying sorties by aircraft type

Aircraft type	*December 1991*
Buccaneer	59
F-4	33
Harrier	383
Hawk	819
Jaguar	251
Jet Provost	213
Tornado	1,170
Tucano	181
A-10	300
F-111	375
Other aircraft (including helicopters)	2,624
Total sorties	6,408

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the instances of breaches of low-flying regulations since 1988 which led to formal disciplinary action or courts martial under the terms of the Army Act 1955, Air Force Act 1955 or Naval Discipline Act 1957; and if he will list, for each case, the date, location and circumstances of the offence, the type of aircraft involved, the nature of the charge and the outcome of the proceedings.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Breaches of low-flying regulations that lead to proceedingss under the services disciplinary Acts are not recorded centrally.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the baseline year from which the expected reduction of 30 per cent. in jet low-flying over the United Kingdom, announced last October, was calculated.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: 1988.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on the maintenance of a fixed list of simulated targets for toss-and-dive attack in the United Kingdom low-flying system.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: A review of the usefulness of the simulated toss and dive attack target list concluded that although of limited value, the list continues to meet certain needs of a number of flying training units. It has therefore been retained, but will remain under review as part of the continuing monitoring of the United Kingdom low-flying system.

DESO Office, Jakarta

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the main responsibilities of the Defence Export Services Organisation office in Jakarta; how many staff it employs; and what is the cost of running the office since it was established.

Mr. Alan Clark: The DESO office in Jakarta is responsible for providing local assistance and advice to United Kingdom defence companies seeking to market and sell equipment and services to the Indonesian armed forces. The office has three staff. Its estimated running cost is £73,200 per annum.

Territorial Army

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to encourage a new pool of recruits for the Territorial Army; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As part of the restructuring of the Territorial Army, arrangements are being made to establish a recruits pool by 1 April 1995 with the aim of permitting greater flexibility in the future management of TA manpower. At the same time, we will continue to mount publicity and recruiting campaigns to attract the volunteers needed to ensure that the TA in the future is fully manned.

Royal Navy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the operational strengths of the Royal Navy and of other former South-East Asia Treaty Organisation countries.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Royal Navy currently has three aircraft carriers, an escort fleet which is reducing to around 40 destroyers and frigates, two assault ships and other specialist amphibious shipping, and a substantial flotilla of smaller warships including mine countermeasures vessels and offshore patrol vessels. In addition to the four Polaris boats, we currently have fifteen nuclear-powered submarines and six diesel electric submarines. It is not our policy to comment on the strengths of other countries' armed forces.

Services Properties

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many properties for service men are at present unoccupied; and how many have been unoccupied for more than one year.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As at 31 December 1991, the latest date for which figures are available, 9,817 service married quarters were vacant and 2,161 of these, representing 3 per cent. of our total stock, had been vacant for more than one year. Many of these 9,817 vacant properties were either undergoing or awaiting major maintenance work or modernisation, some were already allotted to service families who were due to move in shortly and others were being considered for disposal. In addition, 1,560 dwellings were in the process of being sold.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish a table showing the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in his Department in each of grades (i) 1, (ii) 2, (iii) 3, (iv) 4, (v) 5, (vi) 6, (vii) 7, (viii) SEO, (ix) HEO, (x) administrative trainee, (xi) EO, (xii) CO and (xiii) CA.

Mr. Alan Clark: The following full-time equivalent numbers of men and women in grade level equivalents grade 1 to AA were employed in the Ministry of Defence on 1 April 1991:

Grade	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*
Grade 1	4·0	—	4·0
Grade 2	11·0	—	11·0
Grade 3	63·0	1·0	64·0
Grade 4	31·0	—	31·0
Grade 5	370·0	12·0	382·0
Grade 6	832·0	13·0	845·0
Grade 7	3,079·0	131·0	3,210·0
SEO	6,290·5	365·5	6,656·0
HEO	12,008·5	2,052·0	14,060·5
EO (Note 1)	18,050·0	4,153·5	22,203·5
AO (Note 2)	10,416·5	13,566·5	23,983·0
AA (Note 2)	2,587·0	10,352·5	12,939·5
Totals	53,742·5	30·647·0	84,389·5

Note 1. Five male administration trainees are included in the EO grade level equivalent figures.
Note 2. Formerly titled CO and CA respectively.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of employees in his Department; and how many are *(b)* black and *(b)* disabled.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information as at 1 January 1992, based on voluntary surveys, is:

Staff	*Number*
Total staff (industrial and non-industrial)	133,158
Total Respondents to ethnic minority survey	111,118
Self-identified ethnic minority staff	2,041
Registered Disabled staff	1,164

Civilian Employees

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the number of civilian employees at RAF Lossiemouth, RAF Kinloss, RAF Leuchars, RN Bases Coulport, Faslane and Rosyth, and Royal Marine Base Condor.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is not our policy to divulge the number of employees at individual MOD establishments.

Disarmament Proposals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what issues will be discussed at the next planning meeting of the group of scientific experts on technical test—GSETT-2—of the United Nations committee on disarmament in Geneva in March; and what proposals United Kingdom representatives will make to the meeting.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The next meeting of the UN conference on disarmament ad hoc group of scientific experts' is to be held in Geneva between 2 and 13 March. The main subject for discussion at the meeting will be the preparation of the final report on the results of the group of scientific experts (GSE) technical test 2 for submission to the conference on disarmament. The United Kingdom will participate in the discussions aimed at achieving a consensus report. In addition, a technical working paper summarising local seismic information and aimed at improving the definition of United Kingdom seismic sources will be tabled. It is hoped this will stimulate other GSE participants to publish similar information for application to small seismic sources which occur within their national boundaries.

Armed Services (Salary Increases)

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will tabulate the salary increases applicable to all ranks in the armed services from 1974 to 1979, from 1980 to 1985 and from 1985 to the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The salary increases applicable to all ranks of the armed services as requested by my hon. Friend are:

Rates of military salary
Percentage increase in pay

	Financial year to financial year		
	1975-76 to 1979-80	*1979-80 to 1985-86*	*1985-86 to 1991-92*
Military salary: all ranks	74·2	68·4	59·3
Senior officers (Major General and above)	40·6	91·2	63·3

		Financial year to financial year 1975-76 to 1979-80	1979-80 to 1985-86	1985-86 to 1991-92
Officers (up to Brigadier)		63·3	84·5	62·1
Other ranks (Sergeant and above)		76·0	70·6	59·2
Other ranks (up to Corporal)		77·1	61·3	58·1
Rank details in Army terms[2]				
Field Marshall (when in full-time military employment)		41·6	119·0	68·9
General		41·7	102·4	61·5
Lieutenant General		44·7	91·0	54·2
Major General		38·9	87·7	67·0
Brigadier		52·5	92·8	70·1
Colonel	after 4 years in the rank	57·0	90·4	66·9
Lieutenant Colonel	after 4 years in the rank	62·0	92·8	66·2
Major	after 4 years in the rank	65·2	83·5	61·5
Captain	after 3 years in the rank	63·0	82·1	62·1
Lieutenant	after 2 years in the rank	62·2	79·5	60·6
Second Lieutenant		62·7	72·1	57·0
Warrant Officer I	band 6, scale C; after 18 years[1]	71·8	77·0	58·8
Warrant Officer II	band 6, scale C; after 18 years[1]	72·1	74·6	59·3
Staff Sergeant	band 5, scale C; after 18 years[1]	70·9	70·4	58·8
Sergeant	band 5, scale C; after 12 years[1]	72·8	68·5	59·4
Corporal	class 1, band 2, scale C	76·7	64·1	60·0
Lance Corporal	class 2, band 1, scale C	76·6	59·1	58·5
Private	class 2, band 1, scale C	73·5	56·2	56·1

[1] Includes long service increment payments
Rates are based on gross pay, taking account of delayed and staged implementation of pay awards.
[2] These rates apply also to personnel of equivalent rank and pay bands in the other services.
Details of 1974-75 are not available in the required format to enable use as the base year.

Defence Expenditure

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his oral answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column 119, to the hon. Member for Rhondda, (Mr. Rogers), over what time period the 25,000 redundancies occurred; whether the jobs lost were directly or indirectly dependent on defence expenditure; whether the jobs lost were dependent on equipment expenditure, non-equipment expenditure or exports; in which regions these job losses have occurred; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The source of the figure quoted was public announcements by major defence companies since 1990. Employment levels are a matter for the commercial judgment of the companies concerned, and my Department does not hold the further information that the hon. Gentleman requests.

Polaris and Trident

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will now make it his policy to answer questions about the repair and maintenance programme of the *(a)* Polaris and *(b)* Trident fleets.

Mr. Alan Clark: All such questions will be, and have been, given answers subject only to commercial confidentiality and security constraints.

Long-term Costings

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the financial implications that result from his policy regarding the release of information on long-term costings.

Mr. Alan Clark: I have nothing to add to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces on 7 February 1992.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for the British defence industry of his policy regarding the release of information on long-term costings.

Mr. Alan Clark: No such assessment has been made, nor would be appropriate, as "Long Term Costing" is an internal planning document. The implications of our expenditure plans are discussed regularly with industry.

Yugoslavia

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for "Options for Change" of the deployment of British service personnel with a United Nations peacekeeping force in Yugoslavia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are still discussing with the United Nations what form a United Kingdom contribution to the peacekeeping operation in Yugoslavia might take. In selecting what British assets might be offered to the United Nations for this operation, the Government have taken account of its policy "Britain's Defence for the 90s".

Environmental Manual

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many copies of the departmental environmental manual have been *(a)* printed and *(b)* distributed to staff; and how many copies of the proposed booklet on public access to the defence estate will be published for issue to the public.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Of an initial print run of 10,000 copies of the Ministry of Defence environmental manual some 8,400 copies have already been distributed. An additional 10,000 copies have been printed for further distribution and stock purposes. There will be an initial

print of 2,000 copies of the leaflet "Walks on Ministry of Defence land" to coincide with its planned launch in early March. Current plans envisage a final run print of up to 100,000 copies of the leaflet for distribution to the public.

Defence Budget

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *329*, on the defence budget, on how many occasions in each of the last six months he has made available information on plans for, and progress of, individual projects.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My Department makes available information on the plans and progress of projects in a wide variety of ways. These include parliamentary statements, debates and questions; the Statement of the Defence Estimates; press releases and briefings; and discussions with industry and trades union which range from the major conferences held by the Procurement Executive controllers to contacts in the normal course of business. It would not be feasible to list the information made available through these means in the last six months.

Financial Planning and Management Group

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *330*, when the Financial Planning and Management Group was established; and what work it has carried out since its establishment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Financial Management Group was established at the end of 1977. Its role is to oversee the Ministry of Defence's financial and management process and to make recommendations as necessary to the Secretary of State.

Budget Holders

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *329-30*, if he will publish the estimated future expenditure for higher level budget holders in each year for the next 10 years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This information is derived from the long-term costing. As explained by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement in his answer of 2 May last year, *Official Report*, column *294*, it is not our practice to provide such details.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names of all the higher level budget holders.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The answer is:

Commander, Training and Reserve Forces Royal Marines
Major General Royal Marines, Headquarters Commando Forces
Assistant Under-Secretary of State (Naval Personnel)
Director General of Naval Personal Services
Naval Secretary
Medical Director General (Navy)
Director General of Naval Manpower and Training
Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff
Director General Aircraft (Navy)
Director General Ship Refitting
Director General of Supplies and Transport (Naval)
Director General Fleet Support Policy and Services
Hydrographer of the Navy
Assistant Under-Secretary of State (Fleet Support)
Flag Officer Portsmouth
Flag Officer Scotland and Northern Ireland
Flag Officer Plymouth
Naval Base Commander Portland
Naval Base Commander Clyde
Captain, Training Naval Home Command
Chief Staff Officer Reserves
Flag Officer Naval Aviation
Chief of Staff, Headquarters Commander in Chief Fleet
Flag Officer Surface Fleet
Flag Officer Submarines
Commodore Minor War Vessels
Commander United Kingdom Field Army
Inspector General Doctrine and Training
Assistant Chief of Staff, General Staff Division 1, Headquarters British Army of the Rhine
Deputy Chief of Staff, Headquarters British Army of the Rhine, General Staff Division 3
Assistant Chief of Staff, General Staff Division 4, Headquarters British Army of the Rhine
Director General Army Manning and Recruiting
Director General of Personal Services (Army)
Director General Logistic Policy (Army)
Director General of Transport and Movements
Director General of Ordnance Services
Director General of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering
General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland
Director General Territorial Army and Organisation
Director General Military Survey
Director General Command, Control, Communication and Information Systems (Army)
Director General of Support Management
Director General of Support Services
Director General (Policy and Planning)—National Air Traffic Services
Air Secretary
Air Officer Commanding 1 Group
Air Officer Commanding 11 Group
Air Officer Commanding 18 Group
Air Officer Administration, Headquarters Royal Air Force Strike Command
Air Officer Training, Headquarters Royal Air Force Support Command
Air Officer Maintenance, Headquarters Royal Air Force Support Command
Air Officer Administration, Headquarters Royal Air Force Support Command
Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Programmes and Personnel)
Deputy Under-Secretary of State (Policy)
Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Systems)
Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Commitments)
Deputy Under-Secretary of State (Civilian Management)
Deputy Under-Secretary of State (Finance)
Deputy Under-Secretary of State (Personnel and Logistics)
Deputy Under-Secretary of State (Resources and Programmes)
Assistant Chief Scientific Adviser (Capabilities)
Assistant Chief Scientific Adviser (Research)
Assistant Chief Scientific Adviser (Projects)
Assistant Chief Scientific Adviser (Nuclear)
Director of Strategic Defence Initiative Participation Office
Director General Intelligence (Eurasia)
Director General Management and Support of Intelligence
Director General of Strategic and Technical Intelligence
Director General Intelligence (Rest of the World)
Director Operations Meteorological Office
Director Commercial Services Meteorological Office
Director Finance and Administration Meteorological Office
Director Research Meteorological Office

Controller of the Navy
Master General of the Ordnance
Controller Aircraft
Deputy Under-Secretary of State (Defence Procurement)
Head of Defence Export Services
Managing Director Military and Aerospace Divisions Defence Research Agency
Managing Director Electronics Division Defence Research Agency
Managing Director Maritime Division Defence Research Agency

Married Quarters Estate

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on his reasons for proposing the transfer of the ownership and management of the married quarters estate to a new organisation;

(2) if he will describe the size and structure of the new organisation that is due to take over the ownership and management of the married quarters estate; who will staff it; when it will be established; what type of performance monitoring it will employ; how it will be financed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the note placed in the Library of the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in response to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) on 24 February at column *395*. The recommendation of the housing task force that a new, non-profit making organisation should take over from the MOD the ownership and management of the married quarters estate for all three services is being considered in detail by my Department. Announcements on the decision on the recommendation will be made in due course.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 204**

SESSION 1991–92

17th February—28th February 1992

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

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Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

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